**Inter-movement politics for inter-people alliance**

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(The following is the last of my paper titled “Toward the Autonomy of the People of the World – Need for a new movement of movements to animate people’s alliance processes,” in “The movement of movements Part 2,” edited by Jai Sen, Open World, 2019)

Social movement today, in my view, faces this kind of historic challenge. (how to overcome the overdetermined multilayered oppression) For alliance building, movement plays a decisive role in helping this process get under way. Boaventura de Sousa Santos, discussing the World Social Forum and the global left, noted that one of the salient features of WSF’s contribution was “the passage from a movement politics to inter-movement politics.” [[1]](#endnote-1) By inter-movement politics he meant “a politics run by the idea that no single issue social movement can succeed in carrying out its agenda without the cooperation of other movements.” I fully agree. Inter-movement politics, however, is not complete in itself. Also it is not merely a matter between issue-based movements. In the people’s alliance context, it carries more general signification. A few important features involved include the following:

1. **Inter-people politics**: Inter-movement politics, if relevant, must involve inter-people politics. Meaningful social movements always have their respective constituencies of which they are organic part. Inter-movement politics can have significance only when it is integral to inter-people politics and is not closed within itself. In other words, inter-movement politics is tested by the degree to which it engenders inter-people interactive politics conducive to people-to-people alliance making.
2. **Movement and constituency**: This does not mean, however, that a specific movement “legitimately” and monopolistically represents one constituency considered more or less homogeneous. The constituency itself is a mobile entity comprising complex identities. The relevance of inter-movement politics should prove itself by organic relationships it creates and recreates with the community. Inter-movement politics also works within the same constituent community which usually generates plural movement initiatives.
3. **Interaction:** Interaction between people, as collectives and as individuals, in a positive context is one of the main modes of alliance building. Interaction in a hostile context would mean escalating hostility, distrust, and clashes, but we have abundant experience that people from usually unfriendly or even hostile groups, meeting in a favorable context, find each other just common human beings and friends.
4. **Mediation:** Let me call this kind of interaction virtuous interaction. The other type is vicious interaction that aggravates conflicts. For virtuous interaction to take place, mediation is essential. Movement is expected to be an essential element of mediation. Assumptions under the old paradigm were that classes are represented by their parties and class alliances are deemed arranged when the parties representing them come together to sign a joint front agreement. Now we know movements, let alone political parties, do not represent the people’s collectives. It is the people’s groups themselves that interact and enter into alliance processes. And in these processes movements based in their constituencies play indispensable mediating roles.
5. **Bonds:** How can virtuous interaction take place among different communities, even those apparently antagonistic to one another? I cannot go too far here into this crucial question that would involve philosophical inquiries. But we all know that there are some certain bonds which enable human beings to live together in friendly relationships. Despite mounting evidence to the contrary, tempting us to be cynical, we cannot totally deny the working of this deeply seated social despite all evidence to the tempting us to be cynics. Christians may call it love, Hardt and Negri “love,” Confucians “jin” (perfect value, or benevolence), Buddists “jihi” (mercy), and others by other names. I dare not give it a name though in 1969 we called it “peopleness.” At a more practical level, John Brown Childs, theorist and advocate of trans-communality, talks about “general ethics of respect.” All these terms seem to point to the ability of the people to make human linkages, displayed in multi-faceted actual practices.
6. **Internal impacts**: Virtuous interaction can cause changes not only in the mutual relationships between groups, but also the internal power relationships and cultures within the groups involved in emancipating directions. Through virtuously constituted interactions, the communities involved often deliver to one another new values that in the long run will work changes in the fossilized original value systems that often have oppressive impact on all or some of their members, kicking off an educational process which in turn will generate internal forces to change the internal cultures and relationships.
7. **Structural changes:** We said that under the capitalist regime different communities and collectives of the people are bound together, even despite themselves, into antagonistic relationships, typically of hierarchical formation. Alliance building therefore would not continue, even if virtuous interaction is constituted, if the oppressing/oppressed, exploiting/exploited, dominating/dominated relationships that exist between collectives are allowed to continue. For alliance building to continue and develop, this process should entail processes mitigating the real and structural as well as subjective unequal power relationships in the direction of their eventual abolition. Otherwise, alliance building will stay a mere lip service of solidarity and be discredited.
8. **Alliance and economic articulation:** This aspect of the matter takes us to a broader area of building another world, or another global society. In the classical Marxist-Leninist understanding, a worker-peasant alliance was not only the key to the formation of revolutionary power but also the basis of economic articulation in a new society between industry and agriculture, or urban and rural. The first wave experience (mostly negative) should be reassessed from this angle, namely, the economic aspects of class alliances and antagonisms. The people’s alliances we envisage, though they embody far more complex inter-group articulation than worker-peasant, are pregnant with some future economic articulation of another world. This means that the people’s alliances are not just a political partnership that is likely to collapse the moment political goals they are aimed at are achieved, but rather the embryo of the society yet to come. Alliance building through interaction and relational transformation will involve processes of changing the existing patterns of articulation of socio-economic actors and activities toward another economy.
9. **Dialogue with nature:** Interaction should take place not only among the people. The alliance building process of necessity entails reflection on the whole course of capitalism-driven modern civilization, particularly its arrogance toward nature (including our bodies). Interaction – or dialogue – will be started with nature, learning particularly from wisdom of indigenous peoples, to find ways to undo the self-destruction we have willingly inflicted upon ourselves through redefinition of development and progress.
10. **People’s charter making process**: Alliance building through positive and virtuous interaction is a dynamic process and therefore fluid and changeable. But at each phase of the process, the parties involved must negotiate terms of agreement at a given time on a certain basis. In other words, the permanent process needs times of punctuation. This will represent the formal aspect of alliance building. This means that we are coming up with inter-people social contracts at diverse levels. Some of them may be written out and signed on and others may be accepted as new habits observed and practiced. At a time when nation states are still there, the autonomous agreements may be institutionalized or even made into state laws or written into international covenants. Let me emphasize that these are processes already under way but not necessarily perceived as steps of alternative world building as they are seen only in issue-based contexts. Thus, in actuality, alliance building processes are, explicitly or implicitly, social contract making processes. The agreements and contracts are also renewable and actually being renewed reflecting new inter-people relationships. Movements are there as agency to remake them through inter-movement politics. If these numerous autonomous inter-people contracts and agreements proliferate and are accumulated, linking ever broader segments of global people’s activities, and begin to guide the course of events, then we approach inter-people autonomy whose shared basis will be a people’s charter composite of numerous agreements and in constant renewal process.

**Movement or space? – WSF as a new type of movement**

Now, I go back to the actual movement, “movement of movements” and its important arena, World Social Forum. I hear that for some time, whether WSF is a space or a movement has been debated as an issue relevant to the very nature of WSF. I have no doubt that WSF is a movement but should be consciously a movement of a new type. When Chico Whitaker, probably one of the strong proponents of “space,” says “movement and space are complete different things,” I disagree with this dichotomy. According to Chico,

A movement *congregates* people — its activists, as the activists of a party — who decide to organize themselves to collectively accomplish certain objectives. Its formation and existence entails the *definition* of strategies to reach these objectives, the *formulation* of action programs, and the *distribution* of responsibilities among its members — including those concerning the direction of the movement. Those who assume this function will lead the activists of the movement, getting them — through authoritarian or democratic methods, according to the choice made by the founders of the movement — to take responsibility for their commitments in the collective action. Its organizational structure will necessarily be pyramidal however democratic the internal process of decision and the way used to choose those who will occupy different levels of management might be. On the other hand, its effectiveness will depend on the explicitness and precision of its *specific objectives*, and therefore, of its own boundaries in time and space.[[2]](#endnote-2)

Sure, WSF should not be, and cannot be either, a movement of the type Whitaker described. True, there may be some people who want to reorganize WSF in that image. But rejection of this type of movement would not justify the idea of WSF being a square rented for free use. In between the two poles is the possibility and necessity of a new type of movement. WSF I believe should develop itself as such a movement – **a movement devoted to generating and mediating interactions among diverse groups of people and deliberately igniting processes to build and develop inter-people alliances based on multilateral agreements that will form the body of the people’s charter for global people’s self-rule.**

Is such effort a movement? I think this is exactly what people call movement of movements. This coinage vaguely implies cooperation among various movements but can be understood as temporary, utilitarian cooperation. I think it can mean far more.

WSF has created excellent possibilities for a new type of movement to emerge. And in fact numerous workshops and other events in the arena offer various issue-, sector-, class-, gender- and otherwise based movements to meet, develop common platforms, and common action. But WSF’s efforts to encourage inter- movement politics, it appears to me, have been absent or minimal. As far as I know, meetings of social movements which used to be held as one of the voluntary projects were not intended, nor appropriate, as an occasion to facilitate serious, patient discussion and negotiation for transborder alliance building. Setting dates of worldwide action and agreeing on general goals, it seems to be, was the utmost the social movement gathering could agree on. It is time for us to clearly recognize inter-movement politics, and for that matter inter-people politics, in its own right, as a new dimension of movement.

I think time is ripe for change. The Bush administration ironically gave us a focus – the war while WTO another focus – neoliberal globalization. WSF functioned as an effective arena where by the momentum of huge getting together people emerged as “another superpower” making their presence felt. But that stimulus is gone with the downfall of Bush, leaving Empire and global capitalism bogging down, so that hostile global focuses facilitating people’s mobilization too have become less visible. Instead of constituting ourselves chiefly by reacting to the global power, we need to find ways to constitute ourselves among ourselves through the medium of movement of movements.

1. Boaventura de Souza Santos, “The World Social Forum and the Global Left,” http://www.forumsocialmundial.org [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Chico Whitaker, “The WSF As Open Space,” Jai Sen et al.-ed., World Social Forum: Challenging Empires, Viveka Foundation, 2004, pp.112-3 [↑](#endnote-ref-2)