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Resistance to globalization

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Resistance to globalization refers to the gamut of struggles and actions of social groups and individuals in response to the dislocating consequences of neoliberal reforms and its effects in the spheres of the economy, politics and identity/culture.

The expansion of capitalism has historically encountered resistances from social groups affected by its disruptive and disentitling impacts. Yet, it is not until the mid 1990s that the notion of a resistance to globalization enters the language of the social sciences and the mass-media to designate the worldwide upsurge of different forms of social unrest in relation to the dominant policies, institutions and consumerist culture associated with neoliberal globalization.

At least two sets of conditions explain the emergence of a concept of resistance to globalization. First, objective conditions inscribed in the features of global capitalism: the revolution of information technologies; the centrality of a global financial market in all productive activities; the transnationalization of production; the privatization of global commons; the salience of transnational corporations, rising social inequality and ecological degradation. These features account for the interconnectedness of socioeconomic, environmental, cultural and political processes across a global space.

Second, subjective conditions associated with the rise of a global consciousness (Robertson 1992) expressed in an emerging transnational managerial class linked to global production and services (Van del Pijl 1998) and a global resistance movement. In the latter case, such new subjectivities capture a transformed relation between space and time which, in turn, opens possibilities for new notions and practices of citizenship, social mobilization and state power through which market rationalities are distributed and embodied locally (Appadurai 2002).

Both sets of conditions facilitated the awareness that local events are embedded in global processes, thus making global approaches a necessary condition to redress the negative consequences of globalization. In other words, resistance to globalization emerges as a category for thinking and acting in a context of interconnected capitalism.

The concept and the practices of resistance to globalization are shaped as part of dialectical and co-determining processes. A cycle of spontaneous and organized grassroots mobilization begins towards the mid 1990s to express a generalized discontent with the consequences of neoliberal globalization. Demonstrations target symbols of neoliberal globalization such as free trade integration projects, institutions of international economic governance, intergovernmental organizations aligned with a neoliberal ideology and transnational corporations. The shaping of notion of resistance to globalization took place in relation to the wave of large popular protests that captured the attention of the global public opinion.

The rise of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation in Mexico's poorest southern areas in 1994 in response to the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) is often taken as a landmark event in what has come to be a new form global resistance politics. As an indigenous and peasant movement, the Zapatistas resist imposition of a universal model of development advanced by NAFTA and based on the commodification of social life. They succeeded in galvanizing a transnational solidarity movement to voice their local conflict as intimately related with the dynamics of corporate capitalism.

The NAFTA project also led to other dynamics like the tri-national coordination

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of grassroots and labor movements from the United States, Canada and Mexico, as well as to a vibrant anti-sweatshop movement in North American universities. Similarly, resistance to the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) initiative triggered the formation of an unprecedented transnational campaign of mobilization aligning a road-based coalition of rural and urban social organizations throughout the Americas. This campaign raised opposition to the trade project accentuating differences between governments which led to the halting of the FTAA in 2005.

Public protests to international institutions responsible for formulating neoliberal policies also became a target of mass demonstrations and riots. The most emblematic of such events was the so-called Battle of Seattle in 1999 where citizen actions were directed at successfully preventing governments from launching a new trade liberalization round of the World Trade Organization (WTO). Others demonstrations took place in WTO meetings in Cancún in 2003 and Hong Kong in 2005, leading to subsequent meetings being held in remote locations with tough security measures and difficult access for protestors.

Moreover, meetings of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank have been occasions for demonstration, in addition to international forums like the Group of Eight (G8) and the Group of 20 (G20). The protests of the G8 summit in Genoa in 2001 ended with the death of an activist. In the context of the global financial crisis that began in 2008, the impacts of the IMF-backed structural adjustment policies in Europe has led to a renewed cycle of protests and strikes across Europe.

Transnational corporations have also been a target of resistance actions throughout the world. Virulent conflicts engage local populations, companies and public authorities in disputes over the control, distribution of costs and benefits, and sustainable development implications of natural resources production. From 1992 the struggles of the Ogoni people against Shell over oil in Nigeria has received widespread international attention. Also, resistances to the destructive impacts of the mining industry are intensifying in countries along the Andes Mountain range, Indonesia, Papua New Guinea and Australia. Increasingly these community struggles link up with shareholder activism in countries where the mining corporations are legally registered. Local struggles reach global dimensions with advocacy campaigns such as campaign against the Barrick Gold Corporation. Many other examples of community conflicts can be found in relation to agro-business and its development and health implications for populations exposed to the use of pesticides, the impacts of monoculture crops in biodiversity, land grabbing practices and resistances to corporate control of seeds through patented genetically modified biotechnology.

Likewise, resistance to neoliberal globalization has also taken the form of opposition to the transfer of public services to transnational corporations. This is the case with the popular riots that took place in early 2000 in Cochabamba, Bolivia, to reverse the concession of water services to the Bechtel water utility company.

Such worldwide proliferation of social clashes with corporate-driven globalization led scholars to reflect about the nature of such conflicts and their relation with globalizing political economy (Amoore 2005; Gills 2000). To what extent can the myriad instances of contestation to neoliberalism amount to a general phenomenon that can be characterized as a resistance movement to globalization? If so, what are its defining features?

The many names used to refer to the events associated with a resistance to globalization reflect the ambivalence about its identity and the plurality of its agendas. It is often defined as: the anti-globalization; counter-globalization; alter-globalization; anti-corporate globalization; anti-capitalist and global justice movement; as a movement of movements and as the movement of globalization from below. This heterogeneity accommodates views of resistance as reconceptualized forms of global anarchism (Curran 2007), radical

democratic projects and reformist global agendas. Competing accounts of global resistance often differ on their "specific understandings of what power means, how it is exercised, and what is the nature of politics and political life" (Amoore 2005: 3). Yet, they nonetheless share a general concern with the unequal concentration of wealth and power, poverty, the weakening of labor conditions, the democratic deficit of global institutions and processes, the destruction of the environment and all forms of domination based on class, race, gender, culture and sexuality.

Some accounts of politics of resistance call for the need to bring the state back to act as a countervailing force to neoliberal globalization, but also of suitable new governance institutions to cope with the challenges of an interconnected world economy. This is the case of perspectives inspired in Karl Polanyi's notion of resistance as a "counter-movement." As originally conceived, this concept refers to the self-protective measures taken by society to cope with the disruptive and polarizing effects of industrial capitalism in England during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Neoliberal globalization led to a new great counter-movement, a societal contestation to the effects of a market-driven integration (Munck 2007). Resistance to globalization is about the struggles to overturn the trend towards a capitalist economy disengaging from its socially-defined functions. Namely, it is about reclaiming control of the market.

Another account builds on the notion of "counter-hegemonic resistance" introduced by Antonio Gramsci. Here resistance is about the actions of oppressed groups, or subaltern forces, directed at undermining the power strategy used by ruling classes to create and maintain social order in conditions of uneven capitalist development. The legitimacy of social order is secured with the resort to a combination of consent and domination. In its original inception, counter-hegemony was directed at seizing control of the state apparatus through its direct assault (war of position) or through a long-term strategy to transform the social attitudes and values reproduced in civil society organizations (war of maneuver). The legitimacy of the social order depends on the naturalization of such ideas so they come to be accepted as common sense.

From this perspective, resistance to globalization is about gaining control of the state by democratic means in order to advance a national-popular political project and thereafter realign international political relations to transform globalization. It is also about contesting the accepted and institutionalized knowledge and ideology that legitimates the common sense of neoliberal globalization and its faith in the market (Mittelman 2004). This is done by exposing the "accumulation by dispossession" logic inherent in global capitalism (Harvey 2003) which renders it contradictory with democracy (Gill 2003). This is the idea that wealth is generated at the expense of depriving peoples of their rights, leading to unprecedented levels of social inequality, disempowerment and ecological destruction. In addition to struggles centered on the state, resistance is also about the transnational alignment of subaltern forces throughout the world in the making of a counter-hegemonic vision of globality capable of informing transformative forces in local/national struggles of emancipation.

The politics of resistance to globalization is also driven by other conceptions of power and agency. Postmodern accounts are skeptical of any institutionalized form of democratic representation that may be part of effective resistance. This applies to the state, political parties (Holloway 2002) or whatever organizational leadership structure that may aspire to act as representative of a multitude of unmediated and irreducible multiplicity of resistances (Hardt & Negri 2000).

Instead, this view emphasizes the localization of struggles at the level of communal life. Indigenous variants of this perspective of resistance to global capitalism places emphasis on community autonomy, identity politics, communal rights and rights to a variety of traditional practices which many times threaten deeply held values in state-based systems (Mander & Tauli-Corpuz 2006). Likewise, feminist activists stress the internal politics of

the resistance movement to argue that gender perspectives tend to be marginalized, raising profound implications for the construction of inclusive alternative globalizations (Eschle & Maiguashca 2010).

These understandings of resistance to globalization should not be taken as being antagonistic. They are rather inherent tensions that drive the politics of movements. In this interplay between multiple forms of resistance are defined the variable relations that movements establish with institutionalized politics and the innovative practices of participatory democracy (De Sousa Santos 2008).

The construction of alternatives to neoliberalism is also a form of resistance to a globalization that has been shaped by the expanding power of transnational corporations. Alternatives are seen in the emergence of new forms of flexible organization for resistance, such as transnational advocacy networks like Our World Is Not for Sale (OWINS) against a neoliberal agenda in the WTO; the Global Unions organization reflecting a renewed internationalism of the labor movement; and transnational social movements such as the global peasant movement Via Campesina.

In addition to protests, there are new practices of engagement with power struggles as the engagement in deliberative processes like the World Social Forum, peoples' tribunals and summits. Moreover, resistance practices include global advocacy campaigns in multiple institutional levels of decision-making, legal courts and grassroots participatory spaces. Some of these campaigns have been successful, such as the one that led to a declaration of the United Nations that access to water constitutes a human right.

Moreover, resistance is also about the discursive articulation of novel ways of seeing current challenges and undermining ongoing power relations. The discourse of nature as bearing rights that emerges from Bolivia as part of global public debates on climate change is particularly salient. In a rights-based language these ideas synthesize a defense of the environment, critique the commodification of nature inspired in an indigenous spiritual worldview and the historical and ecological debt of industrial countries towards developing societies in polluting and plundering the environment.

Some novel institutional arrangements signal alternative ways of structuring social life beyond purely market-centric conceptions. In Latin America there have been sweeping sociopolitical changes in societies where resistance to neoliberalism during the 1990s has been the most militant. New leaderships crystallized grassroots demands for social change in historically unprecedented constitutional processes. Among these, the most important changes are seen with the creation of a pluri-national state in Bolivia, Ecuador and in Venezuela. These examples are nonetheless inscribed in a general trend throughout the world towards increased regulatory state functions in the market and statist forms of capitalism.

Furthermore, initiatives of local community developments and governance arrangements such as participatory budgets in local governments, cooperatives and workers-run factories add to regional groupings like the Bolivarian Alliance for the Americas (ALBA) to promote cooperation on the basis of solidarity and economic complementarity instead of competition. Finally, the Bolivian government, with the support of social organizations, development and industrialization promotes the creation of an International Climate Justice Tribunal. This suggests new horizons in the dispute for counter-hegemonic cosmopolitan orders.

SEE ALSO: Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas; Citizenship; Civil society; Counter hegemonic globalization; Globalization; Globalization from below; Glocalization; Imperialism; La Vía Campesina; Multitude; Neoliberalism; Social movements; Transborder activism; World Social Forum.

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