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*A Cosmopolitanism from Below:  
Alternative Globalization and the Creation  
of a Solidarity without Bounds\**

*Introduction*

THE UNPRECEDENTED coupling of a savage neoliberalism that exacerbates already glaring domestic and global disparities in wealth distribution with a “clash of fundamentalisms” (Ali 2002) pitting co-constitutive and Manichean brands of religious extremism to one another has prompted many prominent figures to call for a new internationalism among the world’s peoples (Beck 1999, pp. 1-18; Bourdieu 1998, 2001; Derrida 1994, 2001; Habermas 2001, 2003; Habermas and Derrida 2003). Solidarity itself is hardly a novel concern, having been present at the heart of sociology since the latter’s disciplinary inception during the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when European thinkers began to be seriously preoccupied by the potentially corrosive impact upon social cohesion of the transition from the medieval to the modern epoch. Nevertheless, the worrisome ambiguity of our current predicament, which lurches between the belligerent reassertion of ethnic nationalism and religious tribalism, on the one hand, and the unfulfilled promise of a globalizing world order, on the other, gives us a new and urgent impetus to ask: how, exactly, do we foster a sense of solidarity without bounds? And although sub- and supra-national solidaristic ties have existed in

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various forms and to different extents over time, the widespread recognition of the phenomenon of globalization provides us with an opportunity to put into question the implicitly national frames of reference within which most conventional explanations of social solidarity operate (1).

Enter cosmopolitanism, which, despite having a long and distinguished pedigree, has recently resurfaced as an appealing alternative to the dynamics noted above. Whether in its guise as a universalist moral ideal whereby human beings should primarily understand themselves as citizens of the world respectful of and conversant with a multiplicity of ways of life, or as a political project devising a vibrant body of international law and transferring sovereignty “upward” to institutions of global governance, the contemporary cosmopolitan position is undoubtedly promising. Nevertheless, much of this potential remains unfulfilled because cosmopolitans’ distrust of thick social relations — which they equate too readily with the primordialism of ethno-nationalism and other “pre-political” identities — causes them to adopt an excessively formalist and thin conception of the socio-cultural dimensions of collective existence (Calhoun 2002, 2003). This socially minimalist position promotes an understanding of global solidarity according to which the latter consists of a process of trick-le-down integration of the world’s citizens through their adherence to a common political culture composed of universal principles (participatory democracy, human rights, etc.) entrenched in international law and global institutions.

Although this kind of project from above is essential to achieving a sense of solidarity without bounds, my aim in this paper is to demonstrate that cosmopolitanism is, just as importantly, a transnational mode of practice whereby actors construct bonds of mutual commitment and reciprocity across borders through public discourse and socio-political struggle. In other words, the crux of the matter lies in grasping the work of constructing and performing a cosmopolitanism from below via normatively and politically oriented forms of global social action. I want to claim that this practice-oriented perspective allows us to question three of the main assumptions imbedded within previous versions of

(1) My point is not that solidarity has only existed within the framework of the nation-state; historically — and to this day in some instances — city-states, sub-national regions, continents, supra-national empires, universalist ideologies (religions, political doctrines, and the like), and collective identities (gender,

ethnicity, etc.) have also inspired a sense of togetherness. However, sociologists and other social scientists have generally neglected these other loci of solidarity, primarily employing an understanding of society (and thus of solidarity) that is nationally bounded.

global solidarity, namely cultural homogenization, political fragmentation, and social thinness. Hence, against the argument that human togetherness requires a difference-blind cultural assimilationism, the second section of the paper will contend that the recognition of global cultural pluralism is becoming a *sine qua non* for establishing viable solidaristic ties. Then, to counter the belief that there is a necessary trade-off between the respect for the right to difference and political cohesion, I will try to explain how political alliances between individuals and groups from various parts of the world are taking on a networked or web-like character that is itself the undergirding of cosmopolitanism from below. Finally, to problematize the idea that only a socially thin and formalist cosmopolitanism is possible and desirable, I will highlight the lived culture of an alternative globalization to which ordinary citizens and progressive civic associations active on the world stage (social movements, non-governmental organizations, and the like) are contributing, and thereby thickening transnational social relations.

Throughout the paper, I will draw upon examples taken from the alternative globalization movement (hereafter, the AGM), which is a loose constellation of transnational “subaltern counterpublics” (Fraser 1997a, p. 81) giving birth to the progressive aspects of a fledgling global civil society (2). The AGM began to enter public consciousness around the world with events such as the 1994 Zapatista rebellion in the Chiapas region of Mexico and the Seattle protests that played a part in the collapse of World Trade Organization negotiations in 1999, gaining even more visibility via the annual World Social Forum launched in 2001 and the recent massive protests against the US-led invasion of Iraq. To be clear, my intent is not to champion the AGM or to make the case that it perfectly embodies or fully realizes cosmopolitan ideals. However, I believe that it is “good to think” with it, for its attempts to invent a dif-

(2) Fraser defines subaltern counterpublics as “parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counter-discourses, which in turn permit them to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs” (Fraser 1997a, p. 81). I use the designation “alternative globalization movement” instead of the better known “anti-globalization” tag, for it is clear that the AGM is not opposed to globalization *per se*, but rather to the neoliberal and narrowly economic version of it grounded in market fundamentalism. Furthermore, the AGM has an explicitly global outlook. This is so in terms of the multinational composition of its member groups, the kinds of causes and

strategies they espouse, as well as the means of communication they employ. For the AGM, then, an alternative and substantive project of globalization widens the application of the idea of freedom of movement across borders to include people, ideas and information (e.g., the “sans papiers” movement in France and the ‘No One is Illegal’ organization, both of which defend the rights of undocumented immigrants in the North). An alternative globalization also means fair trade, global distributive justice, recognition of cultural diversity, participatory democracy, peace, and environmental sustainability. See Graeber (2002, pp. 62-65) and Klein (2002a, pp. 76-84).

ferent form of global solidaristic politics can help us work through and reconceptualize the labour of cosmopolitanism from below (3). The AGM is useful in coming to understand that social bonds with distant others are not solely derived from normative principle or institutional arrangements, since they must also be constructed out of public discourse and socio-political struggle.

*The limits of cosmopolitanism from above*

The recent proliferation of academic literature on cosmopolitanism need not be enumerated here, though it should be noted that the preponderance of philosophical and political perspectives on the topic has skewed it in an purely ethical or structural direction (4). From a normative vantage-point, cosmopolitanism represents a universal ideal countering the moral dubiousness of restricted or discrete notions of a community of reciprocal rights and obligations, while in institutional terms, it is a by-product of a redesign of the structures of global governance. Yet neither normative cosmopolitans nor their institutionalist counterparts have been sufficiently attentive to the transnationalization of the sources of and possibilities for solidaristic action from below, thereby neglecting the processes through which individuals and groups are cultivating relatively thick global social relations.

If we follow the logic of the normativists, the key to cosmopolitanism is for all individuals to understand themselves first and foremost as universal subjects, citizens of the world, and members of the great human family. The well-being of faraway strangers should be no less of

(3) Another caveat is in order: the following pages are not intended as a full-blown political sociology or social movement analysis of the AGM, something that would require a different order of demonstration, evidentiary methodology, and evaluation of the participants (their claims, objectives, resources, successes, etc.). For “insider” accounts of the AGM, see Brecher *et al.* (2000); Cockburn and Saint-Clair (2000); Goodman (2002); Graeber (2002); Klein (2002a); Notes from Nowhere (2003); Starr (2000). For organizational analyses of the World Social Forum, the principal institutional manifestation of the AGM, see Hardt (2002); Mertes (2002); Pianta (2003); Schönleitner (2003).

(4) A partial exception to this critique is found in the area of transnational cultural studies, where a number of landmark studies of globalizing processes and networks (e.g., diasporic groups, hybrid identities, travelling cultures) offer a more socio-cultural angle with regards to cosmopolitanism. See, *inter alia*, Appadurai (1996); Clifford (1997); Friedman (1994); Gilroy (1993, 2000); Ong (1999), as well as the special issues of the journals *Public Culture* (2000, 12 (3)) and *Theory, Culture & Society* (2002, 19 (1-2)). However, for the most part, these analyses have not dealt with how groups are mobilizing the question of universal human solidarity in the name of struggles for an alternative globalization.

a concern than that of our immediate neighbours, for we are all, as free and equal individuals, participants in a universal political culture that entitles us to the same rights and protections regardless of our specific circumstances or identities (Bohman and Lutz-Bachmann 1997; Derrida 2001; Kant 1991; Nussbaum 2002; Singer 2002; Turner 2002). While the ethical universalism underpinning normative cosmopolitanism is laudable in its critique of moral parochialism, it tends to advocate the transcendence or shedding away of local and national ties. To be at home everywhere also means to belong nowhere in particular. This can breed a kind of jet-setting elitism, “the class consciousness of frequent travellers” (Calhoun 2003), that fawns at its own deterritorialized sophistication while cringing at the “provincialism” of anything it perceives to be the more rooted experiences and lifeworlds within which most human beings actually live. Similarly, most normative cosmopolitans have misgivings about situated and particularistic social relations, which in addition to being supposedly incompatible with universalist commitments, they believe to be easily captured for tribalistic purposes. Put simply, all thicker socio-cultural ties are tarred with the brush of ethnic nationalism (5). And although it mounts a compelling case against the socio-economic inequalities embedded in the current world order, the ethical paradigm of global distributive justice fails to explain how its cosmopolitan appeal can effectively achieve its aims. Hence, what we find is a rather anaemic version of cosmopolitanism connecting individuals on the basis of their standing as abstract bearers of universal rights and freedoms, in a manner that is at most tenuously connected to progressive global civil society struggles.

Institutional cosmopolitans, for their part, conceive of solidarity as an offshoot of new schemes of global governance. Writings on cosmopolitan democracy or cosmopolitics have put forth a number of proposals for the redesign of the current world order (Archibugi *et al.* 1998; Falk 1995; Falk 2000; Falk and Strauss 2003; Held 1995). The stress on legal institutionalization is particularly striking in the recent work of Habermas, for whom international law becomes the institutional embodiment and rational lynchpin of a minimalist, universal political consensus organized around the dual pillars of liberal democracy and human rights. Habermas opts for a procedural vision of such a consensus, whereby following of democratically legitimate procedures is the only means by which to secure agreement among free, equal and diverse citizens about decisions regarding the laws under which they will be governed. In other words, procedural legitimacy becomes the central

(5) For a notable exception, see Turner (2002).

mechanism of social integration in a democratic and pluralist political culture. Legal institutionalization simultaneously reflects and shapes the procedural enactment of public deliberation between citizens, since the discourse-ethical conditions of unrestrained and undistorted communication, as well as egalitarian reciprocity and mutual recognition, foster democratic opinion- and will-formation in and through the public sphere. Thus, constitutional patriotism with a cosmopolitan intent consists of a rational attachment to the democratic procedures entrenched in a domestic constitution (or, in the European case, in a prospective supra-national one) and international law, which serve to integrate citizens into a political community (Habermas 1996, pp. 499-500, 513-515; 1998, pp. 117-120, 225-226; 2001, pp. 108-109).

Compounding the social meagreness of Habermas's procedural conception of cosmopolitanism is the weight he places on a cosmopolitan legal order (Habermas 1998, pp. 165-201; 2003; Habermas and Derrida 2003), which effectively overshadows the issue of forging transnational solidaristic relations between individuals and groups. I would contend that despite the fact that a process of cross-civilizational and reciprocally egalitarian public discourse leading to the formation of a universal consensus is desirable, its realization depends upon something more than legislation decreed from above. Habermas attempts to bypass this problem by concentrating on the institutionalization of international law, yet he ends up with a formalist solution that is deprived of the socio-cultural density afforded by an actual dynamic of global opinion- and will-formation about, for instance, the meaning of democracy and the content of human rights discourses (Habermas 1998, pp. 191-193; 2001, pp. 107-108). More significantly for our purposes, he functionally overloads the idea of legal cosmopolitanism, whose formalist framework cannot on its own create a common global political culture and substantive public consensus. Instead, as is the case in a domestic setting where constitutional patriotism and a vibrant public sphere are mutually reinforcing, cosmopolitan law and the cultivation of transnational socio-cultural ties between citizens are entwined and interdependent. Habermas is aware of this, denoting the importance of a common (but so far only Europe-wide) worldview, as well as of civic associations and certain political parties, for the creation of supra-national solidarity (Habermas 2001, pp. 55-57, 102-103, 112; Habermas and Derrida 2003). Nonetheless, this remains an insufficiently elaborated insight in his writings, one whose passing mention pales in comparison to his elaborate discussion of domestic procedural justification and legal cosmopolitanism. In fact, one could go so far as to reverse

Habermas's emphasis, since it can plausibly be claimed that the construction of thicker social relations among global civil society actors is in fact a "trickle-up" precondition for the procedural legitimacy of any body of cosmopolitan law.

*Pace* normativists and institutionalists, there is more to cosmopolitanism than a set of global ethical standards, models of global governance or procedurally justifiable international law. A solidarity without bounds comes into being through modes of discursively mediated socio-political action, something that becomes clearer when civic associations such as the AGM are taken into consideration. In the first place, we can see that transnational social integration along cosmopolitan lines does not require cultural assimilation but, on the contrary, the acknowledgment of global diversity. In turn, the recognition of cultural pluralism need not be a recipe for the fracturing of a shared socio-political project, for the latter can be advanced through the creation of criss-crossing webs of affinity between multiple groups from around the world. And finally, cosmopolitanism does not have to be socially thin, as the lived culture of alternative globalization has a robustness and vitality which thickens transnational social bonds between individuals and groups. Let me now turn to each of these three dimensions of the question in turn.

### *The recognition of global pluralism*

In its normative and institutional incarnations, cosmopolitanism has tended to follow the lead of assimilationist egalitarians (Gitlin 1994; Rorty 1998), according to whom a commitment to equal treatment of all human beings requires cultural uniformity; whether in a national or global polity, socio-political institutions can only grant individual subjects the same rights and freedoms if they are treated as identical citizens. When translated in cosmopolitan terms, assimilationist egalitarianism implicitly expects human beings to follow a path of scaling up of their identities until they become abstract bearers of universal rights and duties, who embrace all of humankind yet are "unencumbered" by sub-cosmopolitan attachments. To be cosmopolitan in this way is to become geographically and culturally disembedded, to adopt a view from nowhere that leaves socio-cultural specificities aside in order to unite under a generic globetrotting banner that falsely universalizes the experiences of economic and cultural elites (Calhoun 2003). Aside from

the fact that it overlooks other, less rarefied cosmopolitan lifeworlds — those of Indians working in call centres to answer queries from American or British clients in real time, or of Maghreban immigrants in France producing *rai* music, for instance — this cosmopolitanism from above elides the extent to which individuals and groups are hierarchically situated in intersecting structures of domination as well as unevenly able and willing to claim a cosmopolitan status. To paraphrase Orwell, all world citizens are equal, but some world citizens are more equal than others.

A practice of cosmopolitanism from below must strive to reconcile egalitarian universalism with a respect for the right to cultural specificity and difference, and thus to include a multiplicity of experiences beyond the confines of the “class consciousness of frequent travellers” (Calhoun 2003). Thus, cosmopolitanism does not signify being from nowhere or everywhere at once, but rather embracing the simultaneous existence of multilayered local, national and global identities. Vitaly, to my mind, it is also premised upon an ethos of cultural openness that actively seeks out and tries to understand and appreciate ways of thinking and acting found in different societies, as well as listening to the voices of those who are not often heard in the elite cosmopolitan discourse.

What is interesting about the AGM in this respect is how it sees resistance to domination as being intimately tied to the search for inclusion of others. Its worldview is deeply engrained in the right to cultural difference and the idea that strength lies in diversity, principles that are strategically useful as rhetorical antidotes to the generic culture spawned by global neoliberalism — a culture that would flatten out variations among peoples in the name of cultivating non-descript consumers for the planet’s shopping malls and docile labour for its workplaces (Bové 2001; Fisher and Ponniah 2003, p. 346; Klein 2002a; Marcos 2002b). But the AGM’s defence of pluralism is also visible on the ground, for as many observers have noted, the protest marches and counter-summits that have greeted various meetings of international financial and political organizations over the last few years (in Seattle, Quebec City, Prague, etc.) — to say nothing of the World Social Forums (6) themselves — have brought together a bewildering range of subaltern groups whose identities and livelihoods are threatened by the current world order: women, indigenous peoples, workers, immigrants,

(6) A journalist’s description of the composition of the 2004 Mumbai World Social Forum is evocative: “At the forum, held for the first time in Asia (January 16-21), were

professors from Tunisia, a Pakistani hard rock band, Irish nuns, and a woman wearing a sign reading ‘Australians for Peace’” (Ramesh 2004, p. 3).

people of colour, gays and lesbians, environmentalists, farmers, and so on (7).

In light of the lessons of feminism and the international women's movement—where the most sophisticated debates about questions of voice and representation have taken place over the last few decades (8)—the AGM is wary of adopting the perspective of a single group as representative of the whole. The diversity of its membership makes such generalizations impossible, for how could the experiences of landless Brazilian peasants stand in for, say, those of Javanese factory workers or Indians opposed to the Narmada Valley dam projects? Its transnational coalitions are best described as patchworks grounded in the local and the national, which are considered to be essential dimensions of existence rather than the remaining traces of provincialism to be eventually overcome. Further, the AGM has come to realize that its embrace of global cultural heterogeneity must not occlude the existence of internal socio-economic asymmetries. Despite neoliberalism's near-universal reach, the material deprivation and organized violence faced by many people from the global South remain considerably worse in degree and kind than those experienced in the North. Although many farmers are joining forces against genetically modified crops, the realities of subsistence farming — let alone landlessness — in South America, Asia and Africa dramatically differ from those of organic agriculture in Europe and North America; the same could be said about transnational environmentalism, with ecological preservation being a *sine qua non* for day-to-day survival for many of the earth's communities (9). Thus, for many civic associations, participation in the AGM is based upon both solidarity with the excluded of the world and opposition to the specific state of affairs and forms of oppression that they confront in their everyday lives.

(7) It is in this spirit that Subcomandante Marcos, the spokesperson for Zapatistas, has made an oft-cited remark: "Marcos is gay in San Francisco, black in South Africa, an Asian in Europe, a Chicano in San Ysidro, an anarchist in Spain, a Palestinian in Israel, a Mayan Indian in the streets of San Cristóbal, a Jew in Germany, a Gypsy in Poland, a Mohawk in Quebec, a pacifist in Bosnia, a single woman on the Metro at 10.00 pm, a peasant without land, a gang member in the slums, an unemployed worker, an unhappy student and, of course, a Zapatista in the mountains" (Klein 2002b, p. 116).

(8) For instance, third wave feminists have

not only exposed the phallogentrism of the universal philosophical subject, but the ethnocentrism and heteronormativity of the idea of global sisterhood and the signifier "woman" found in the writings of their first- and second-wave Western predecessors (Collins 1991; Fraser and Nicholson 1990; Hooks 1984; Mohanty 1988, 1995; Young 1995).

(9) In addition, citizens who attend protests against neoliberal globalization face vastly different levels of personal danger and state repression, the killing or 'disappearance' of activists being quite routine in poor countries (Mertes 2002, p. 108).

When grasped in this way, cosmopolitanism can consist of a broadening of horizons, with the AGM's constituent parts taking steps to substantially engage with and listen to each other. As such, its summits and forums are explicitly designed to provide participants with opportunities to exchange and acquire first-hand information about the difficult political, cultural and socio-economic circumstances faced by ordinary citizens on all continents, in order to gain a more global perspective. For instance, supporters of the Zapatistas who made the trek to the Lacandón jungle in Southern Mexico to attend the International Encuentros for Humanity and Against Neoliberalism rapidly discovered that they were not expected to teach the indigenous peoples of Chiapas how to become world citizens, but to observe indigenous ways of life and discuss the conditions in their own communities. Appreciating and contributing to the preservation of a variety of languages, beliefs and forms of activity thereby becomes a vital part of a different sort of globalization, "a world where many worlds fit" as the Zapatistas themselves are fond of declaring (Marcos 2002a, p. 250). Here, actors can become cosmopolitan by learning to respect and value other ways of organizing social life and believing in universal distributive justice, not by shedding all socio-cultural particularities in order to fit into a single, generic mould.

### *Splinters or webs?*

Having tried to demonstrate that a cosmopolitanism from below need not choose sides in the false antinomy between egalitarian universalism and cultural pluralism, I would now like to tackle another commonly held idea, namely that respecting the right to difference is intrinsically hostile to global solidarity and invariably leads to political fragmentation. There is no doubt that certain kinds of identity politics promote a radical particularism and cultural isolationism that undercut the prospects of cosmopolitanism, fetishizing otherness by championing difference for difference's sake. According to radical particularists, identities are discrete and self-contained, and consequently inherently and absolutely incommensurable. The centre does not and should not hold anymore, for the only way to achieve cultural authenticity and uniqueness is to "go it alone", to opt for separatism and to maintain distances between groups in order to avoid diluting or compromising socio-cultural essences.

However, the alternative to assimilationism is not a radical particularism that substitutes a splintered transnationalism for a homogenizing global uniformity. Better to think of a cosmopolitanism built out of cross-cutting lines of affinity between civic associations in different parts of the world (10). Rather than following a comprehensive or neatly laid out plan, a vast web of this sort contains shifting nodes of commonality and shared interests, with groups discursively negotiating solidaristic bonds and pragmatically assembling alliances that join forces around specific issues while remaining united in resistance to global neoliberalism. This is why the AGM's self-description as a "movement of movements" is fruitful, for it suggests a cosmopolitan mosaic with multiple points of intersection, where horizontal and transversal struggles are simultaneously waged at different scales and in numerous settings around the world (ranging from neighbourhood councils and communal land ownership initiatives to transnational campaigns for women's rights and environmental protection). What commentators have described as the AGM's swarm-like quality is a manifestation of this decentralized and pragmatic assemblage of diverse coalitions between individuals and groups that are differently situated yet can unite without losing their distinctiveness. Over time, as participants in the AGM have discovered and cultivated more and more commonalities and developed a similar analysis of the global dynamics that are harming them, the web is being reconfigured as it continues to expand and become denser (11).

Thus, in addition to the cross-border organizing of labour to stop the global race to the bottom of wages, the AGM has witnessed the formation of a number of alliances that cut across civic associations' conventional constituencies: the Save Narmada Movement opposed to the building of dams on the Narmada River in India has drawn on support from national and international constituencies; during the 1999 WTO protests in Seattle, US ecological activists and union members marched side-by-side and went on to form the Alliance for Sustainable Jobs and the Environment (12); the World Social Forum in Porto Alegre

(10) To this extent, the AGM is an heir of the venerable history of progressive coalition-building beyond territorial borders, which would include abolitionism, feminism, international socialism, the Popular Front during the Spanish Civil War, anti-colonial struggles in the Third World, and the anti-apartheid movement. Today, feminist theory provides the most interesting discussion of affinity-based solidarity. See, among others, Allen

(1999); Dean (1996); Fraser (1997b); Fraser and Nicholson (1990); Young (1990, pp. 172-173, 188-189, 237-241; 1995).

(11) Hardt and Negri's widely cited yet rather murky concept of the "multitude" can serve as a theoretical equivalent to the idea of a web or swarm (Hardt 2002, p. 117; Hardt and Negri 2000).

(12) The banner "Teamsters and Turtles Together at Last!" was amongst the most

was the site where migrant rights organizations (such as the “*sans-papiers*” and the “No One is Illegal” campaign) joined forces with Via Campesina, the global peasants’ union, with regards to corporate agriculture’s exploitation of an undocumented workforce; and culture jammers, who specialize in resistance to advertising and the commercialization of public space, have linked up with unions and women’s groups representing Third World labourers who make many of the consumer goods sold in the North. Moreover, civic associations in one region are replicating the strategies of resistance and campaigns to counter it (e.g., alternative economic models, local representative democracy) pioneered in another region.

The global anti-sweatshop movement nicely illustrates the networked character of the AGM’s cosmopolitanism from below. By learning and listening to eyewitness accounts about the work conditions in Asian and South American factories churning out the garments and athletic shoes advertised and distributed around the globe, North American and European activists have forged links with civic associations in both hemispheres. Public information and protest campaigns (leafleting, picketing storefronts, counter-advertising, etc.) have retraced the underbelly of the global commodity chain that stretches from apparel and clothing stores to transnational corporations’ affiliates and subcontractors, thereby connecting glittering products to the lives of workers employed in sweatshops and *maquiladoras*. Thanks to the anti-sweatshop movement, a growing number of consumers are sensing that they are bound to producers as co-participants in the circuits of global capitalism, and thus that all workers must enjoy certain rights and better working conditions (Klein 2000, pp. 345-363; Young 2003).

The web form of global solidarity that the AGM aims to achieve is a matter of choice and necessity. At one level, having learned from the mistakes of many earlier progressive political movements and parties in which bureaucratic-authoritarian tendencies (with their rigid divisions between leadership and rank-and-file members) became sources of disunity and conflict, participants in the AGM have deliberately set out to invent an organizational structure that is decentralized and relatively flexible (13). Consequently, there is a marked predilection for local self-management and grassroots initiatives stressing direct citizens’ involvement (e.g., participatory budgeting, co-operatives, neighbour-

memorable ones in Seattle (Cockburn and St. Clair 2000, p. 17). This alliance is particularly notable in the context of the bitter “jobs vs. ecology” debates that have often pitted the green and labour movements against one ano-

ther in the US over the past few decades.

(13) See Graeber (2002, pp. 70-72); Notes from Nowhere (2003, pp. 63-73); Schönleitner (2003, pp. 145-148).

hood councils), with bodies such as the World Social Forum and its regional equivalents functioning to loosely coordinate various civic associations and making transnational linkages possible. While no executive body can issue edicts that members must follow, the AGM's network structure is fluid enough to enable civil society actors who do not hold identical positions or represent similar constituencies to coalesce rapidly around emerging events and issues (say, the Narmada Valley dam projects in India or the war in Iraq), as well as to adapt to changing circumstances and requirements (say, direct confrontation or the possibility of negotiations with authorities during demonstrations).

At another level, structural decentralization is a strategic requirement for the AGM given the sheer array of civic associations that participate in it and the sometimes disparate causes they represent (labour, feminism, environmentalism, indigenous rights, peace, anti-poverty, human rights, etc.). Excessive concentration of power, prescription of an ideological outlook focusing on a "primary" source of oppression at the expense of others — for instance, an anti-capitalism or environmentalism that ignores gendered forms of domination — or specification of a rigid programme through which to transform the existing world order would very likely threaten the viability of coalitions within the AGM. Hence, beyond a consensus about the ills of neoliberal globalization, the degrees of political integration and direct collaboration between its constituent parts vary widely; they are generally highest among "transnational advocacy networks" (Keck and Sikkink 1998), yet can extend well beyond these to incorporate broad-based alliances. Global campaigns against genetically modified foodstuffs, for example, have brought together the French "Confédération Paysanne" and the Indian Karnataka State Farmers' Association (Bové 2001, p. 93), while also drawing support from consumer protection groups and ecologists. The nodes in the AGM's network assemble and reassemble around precise issues and events, sometimes giving birth to novel subaltern counter-publics and communities of interest.

How does a web-like structure coordinate its numerous components? The AGM has adopted a set of horizontal organizational mechanisms designed to retain civic associations' grassroots independence while connecting them to one another in at least a minimal fashion. During meetings and forums, participants are organized in affinity groups, self-governing units comprised of a small number of individuals (20 or less) who support each other and are free to decide how and to what extent they will participate in specific forms of activity, as well as what coalitions they will join in the process. Each affinity group selects a

“spoke” who represents its members and is linked to others in spokescouncils, large public deliberative and decision-making assemblies. Whenever contentious decisional matters are raised within these assemblies, the spoke consults her or his affinity group, which takes a position that is then conveyed to the spokescouncil. Finally, a process of open debate and negotiation is initiated in order to encourage the assembly to reach a consensus (14).

By no means are these procedures flawless, since the objective of consensual decisional outcomes puts pressure on outliers and strong disagreements remain within the AGM. Among other things, this is why it has not yet been able to translate its critique of global neoliberalism into a coherent set of policy proposals for a different world order (15). At the same time, the AGM’s structural configuration attempts to balance the need to foster convergence of the different strands of the web with the right to dissent, the fact that participants should not be coerced to adopt a position or commit an act with which they do not explicitly and freely agree (Graeber 2002, pp. 70-71). In fact, I want to argue that this kind of open and decentralized process is more likely to yield sustainable and solid global alliances than top-down models of political authority and enforced unity; because it encourages collaboration, compromise and independence, it can minimize the risk of splintering off. Moreover, it can nurture a cosmopolitanism born out of a commitment to a dialogical widening of horizons, for individuals and groups must justify their positions to others, listen to and consider rival arguments, and thereby be exposed to a wide range of opinions and experiences out of which they can take better informed decisions and even discover previously unknown affinities and interests with other civic associations.

(14) For a more detailed description of affinity groups and spokescouncils, see Graeber (2002, p. 71); Notes from Nowhere (2003, pp. 88, 215).

(15) For instance, a number of substantial differences have come to the fore in the World Social Forum. Should the latter’s long-term objective be the formation of a world government or local self-management? What is the best means of achieving such an objective: reform of the world order or revolution (including armed struggle)? In the shorter term, should it encourage economic de-globalization (through the assertion of national sovereignty or de-linking), or greater

insertion into the world economy? What is the role of political parties (which are formally banned from the World Social Forum) and NGOs vis-à-vis social movements? Should it primarily aim to formulate concrete policy proposals, or be a space for dialogue? On these questions and the relatively underdeveloped state of the AGM’s policy proposals, see Bello (2002); Brecher *et al.* (2000); Hardt (2002); Mertes (2002); Ramesh (2004); Sader (2002); Schönleitner (2003). However, what is remarkable is that, so far, these disagreements have been for the most part the subject of debate and negotiation rather than bitter splits and denunciations.

*The lived culture of alternative globalization*

So far in this paper, I have argued that we can conceptualize a cosmopolitan project that is committed to egalitarian universalism and the recognition of cultural difference, and one that is politically decentralized without compromising the prospect of coalition-building. In this, the final section, I want to push such insights further by explaining how a cosmopolitanism from below is taking shape through the creation of relatively thick and rich bonds of global solidarity, which are sustaining a political culture of alternative globalization ordered around intersecting modes of thought and action, values, beliefs, narratives and symbols. The idea of a progressive political culture emerging out of global civil society is something that the existing literature on cosmopolitanism, with its minimalist conception of transnational social relations, has barely touched upon. As we have seen, normative cosmopolitans put forth principles of world citizenship and care for humankind that abstractly privilege universalist commitments above all others, whereas institutional cosmopolitans concentrate on devising schemes of global governance or procedural norms of international law. Without denying the validity of these ideas, we should note that they are weakly grounded in sociological terms and neglect the extent to which political practice is contributing to the establishment of bonds of mutuality between civic actors located in different parts of the world. Clearly, this lived political culture does not constitute a uniform or totalizing cosmopolitan identity that would replace other layers of social experience or the plurality of conceptions of the good life. Conversely, however, the analysis proposed here does not treat such layers and conceptions as static and already formed prior to global socio-political dynamics; on the contrary, it considers how participation in public dialogue and political struggle can question, expand and transform an individual or group's worldview in a cosmopolitan direction.

Because it stresses both democratic openness and agonism, an Arendtian perspective on political action is useful for our purposes. Indeed, for Arendt (1998, p. 50), public realms foster ties among citizens by virtue of promoting unrestricted exchange of information and opinions, which anyone can assess and contest-Solidaristic relations within discursive communities grow out of debate and deliberation between a variety of divergent positions, not — as is often assumed in certain communitarian arguments — from an original state of civic unani-

mity (16). The cut and thrust of argumentation produces robust social relations between dialogical partners, who in the process of making their respective cases and trying to convince others, develop a respect for them and are exposed to different realities. Developing this line of thinking in a more Habermasian direction, I would contend that the process of rational justification and acknowledgement of the better argument is propitious to mutual recognition and a sense of togetherness among members of discursive communities.

This practice-oriented framework allows us to come to grips with the transnational political culture that the AGM is developing, according to which global civil society actors are becoming involved in overlapping communities of public discourse and political action. Grassroots global social integration is occurring via participation in the devising of a project of alternative globalization, which supports sites and moments of critique of neoliberalism and elaboration of a different world order. Public arenas like the World Social Forum and the 2001 Peoples' Summit of the Americas in Quebec City constitute overlapping communities of discourse, in which civic associations openly voice their demands, explain their experiences and state their opinions with other like-minded groups; solidarity thus results from transnational communicative action (17). This dynamic is sustained by a growing alternative communication infrastructure, made up of community and independent media outlets that pepper the globe (18). And although the internet is a contested political terrain, it remains an essential tool for organizing and exchanging information within the AGM. Without it, global days of action such as the February 12, 2003 marches against the war in Iraq — which were predominantly coordinated and publicized on all

(16) See Arendt (1963, pp. 93-94; 1998, p. 57); Calhoun (1997; 2002, p. 292). Arendt contends that for the American Founding Fathers, the public realm's purpose would disappear if all citizens were of the same opinion because it would not be necessary for discursive exchange to take place (Arendt 1963, p. 93). Similarly, she views absolute unanimity as unhealthy to the democratic life of any people, for it breeds a political conformism that disengages citizens from public activity and speech.

(17) On publics as sources of solidarity, see Arendt (1998, p. 50); Calhoun (2002, pp. 287-295). On the World Social Forum's role as a public space, see Bello (2002, pp. 81-82). As its Charter of Principles declares, "the World Social Forum is an open meeting place for reflective thinking, democratic debate of ideas,

formulation of proposals, free exchange of experiences and interlinking for effective action" (Fisher and Ponniah 2003, p. 354).

(18) Two of the best examples of this alternative communication infrastructure are the Indymedia network, which is made up of local outfits in major cities and regions around the world, and *Le Monde diplomatique*, a monthly French newspaper that has played an important role in the creation of the World Social Forum and currently has 21 foreign editions (and is published in the following languages: French, German, English, Arabic, Catalan, Chinese, Spanish, Esperanto, Portuguese, Greek, Italian, Japanese, Norwegian, Farsi, Russian, Serbian, Czech, and Turkish). For the former, see <<http://www.indymedia.org>>; for the latter, see <<http://www.monde-diplomatique.fr/int>>.

continents through electronic resources (websites, email listservs, etc.) — would scarcely have been conceivable.

Apart from its roots in public discourse, a robust cosmopolitanism is coming into its own today because participation in the AGM is advancing a planetary consciousness, which is itself underpinned by intersecting frameworks of interpretation, symbolic systems, and sets of political and normative beliefs. A global solidarity extending to distant strangers, consisting of a sense of belonging to and responsibility for humankind as a whole, may somewhat counteract the primordialism of inter-civilizational discord, at the same time as it creates interpersonal bonds of trust, respect and mutual assistance among individuals and groups active in the AGM (19). By being exposed to others, civic associations can broaden their visions of human capabilities and of the necessary conditions for a full realized life, as well as being exposed to the diverse forms of injustice and domination connected to neoliberal hegemony; for instance, North American indigenous peoples may learn about the aspirations, demands, and forms of discrimination faced by the Dalit caste in India or the French “*sans papiers*” (undocumented immigrants primarily from the Maghreb and sub-Saharan Africa), and vice versa, with all of them coming to grasp how their existences are being adversely affected by the rule of global capital.

A vital aspect of the lived culture of alternative globalization is the invention and performance of distinctive modes of political action and narrative that become familiar to participants in the AGM and identifiable by external audiences. Therefore, by virtue of being repeated over time and transmitted to others, acts of protest and forms of speech (the marching and storming of barricades, the chanting of slogans, the speeches and advancement of certain arguments, etc.) become ritualized, supplying civic associations with a repertoire of strategies deployed in a variety of settings, from major events on the world stage (such as a G8 summit of world leaders) to localized struggles for basic needs (e.g., opposition to the privatization of electricity and water services in South African townships). The AGM has aimed to erect this repertoire of practices as symbolic markers of resistance to global neoliberalism that affirm their constituencies, vision of a different world order, while signalling to ordinary citizens and world leaders that vast sections of humankind consider the current global state of affairs to be neither necessary nor acceptable.

(19) This is a striking and consistent feature of personal accounts from the frontlines of the AGM. See Cockburn and St. Clair (2000);

Klein (2002a); Mertes (2002, p. 110); Notes from Nowhere (2003).

In addition, the vitality of the AGM's cosmopolitanism from below is attributable to its capacity to tap into the temporal dimension of social life. Playing a socially and culturally integrative role across geographical borders, communication and participation in gatherings at regular intervals enable actors to share common experiences, exchange ideas, and collaborate in the staging of events and campaigns. And in spite of the AGM's recent formation, it has made great efforts to develop a collective memory laden with dense iconography: the image of a masked Subcomandante Marcos and a band of indigenous insurgents (the EZLN) emerging out of the jungles of Chiapas on January 1, 1994 — the date of the North American Free Trade Agreement's implementation — to declare "Ya Basta!" to an unsuspecting world (20); the "five days that shook the world" (Cockburn and St. Clair 2000) in late November and early December 1999, during the "Battle in Seattle" that awoke many North Americans to the mass movement for an alternative globalization; the tearing down of the fence that separated protesters and citizens from official delegates and politicians during the Sixth Summit of the Americas in Quebec City in April, 2001; the annual World Social Forum in Porto Alegre, and most recently in Mumbai, originally timed to coincide with (and thus act as the popular counterpart to) the World Economic Forum in Davos; and the massive February 12, 2003 marches on all continents against the US-led invasion of Iraq. Instances such as these have rapidly become part of the lore of the AGM, quasi-mythological elements that participants keep alive and revive during each new struggle. They form a mnemonic inventory that is 'fired up' during moments of socio-political action and decision-making, and also nourishes a planetary consciousness and sense of belonging to a project dedicated to a just world order.

Finally, it should not be overlooked that the sort of grounded cosmopolitanism I am describing here owes a great deal to the ludic aspects of the culture of alternative globalization. One of the sources of the AGM's popular appeal is to be found in its carnivalesque spirit, its celebration of collective rebellion via aesthetic forms of expression and various sorts of playfully subversive, agit-prop- and situationist-like performances (21). In this way, the AGM is aiming to encourage an

(20) In January, 2004, an international celebration of the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the EZLN uprising took place in Chiapas.

(21) For instance, under the cry of "capitalism is boring!", the April 20, 2001 protest in Quebec City during the Summit of the Americas was dubbed a Carnival Against Capi-

talism. It featured groups such as the Society for Creative Anachronism and the Medieval Bloc, which wielded a "weapon" consisting of a giant catapult lobbing stuffed toy animals over the fence. Other AGM protests have included the Radical Cheerleaders, the Revolutionary Anarchist Clown Bloc, and a Pink

unleashing of the imagination and an eruption of creativity, in order to create social bonds among actors who communally design and experiment with ways of thinking and acting that may expand the boundaries of traditional understandings of political struggle. Moreover, through such unconventional activities as street festivals and concerts, progressive civic associations are attempting to broaden their appeal by reaching out to members of the general public who may not join protest marches but are willing to support aesthetically pleasurable and culturally innovative activities with a critical edge. Moreover, aside from publicizing opposition to neoliberal globalization, politico-aesthetic carnivals are designed to interrupt everyday life's regimentation and disciplining of bodies and minds, and to pull ordinary citizens out of their lifeworlds and temporarily experience for themselves some of the characteristics of the kind of egalitarian and pluralist social order that the AGM is proposing. Hence, the acts of sharing these sorts of ludic public spaces and moments with others, of discussing matters of common concern with them, or yet again of being in a crowd that marches through the streets of a city, can cultivate transnational relations of solidarity (Mertes 2002; Schönleitner 2003, p. 140).

### *Conclusion*

The concatenation of an unbridled neoliberalism, a hardening of ethno-religious conflicts and the acceleration of global integration has thrust cosmopolitanism into the limelight, with an ever-increasing number of thinkers championing it as a way out of our current intellectual and political morass. Some, who I termed normative cosmopolitans, have supported the idea of an enlargement of our moral community to embrace the whole of humankind, while others of a more institutional bent have devised models for the reorganization of global governance structures or appropriate deliberative mechanisms for a democratically legitimate and minimally conceived international political consensus. These are important contributions, with which I am substantially in accord, yet their purely ethical or formalist interpretations of the problem at hand suffer from socio-cultural underdevelop-

Bloc consisting of individuals dressed as fairies and ballerinas. An important player here is the London-based "Reclaim the Streets" movement, which organizes street parties in many

cities around the world (Graeber 2002, pp. 66-67; Klein 2000, pp. 311-323; Notes from Nowhere 2003, pp. 50-61).

ment. This is why, using the AGM as an exemplar, this paper has proposed a notion of cosmopolitanism from below that considers the necessary construction and enactment of ties of mutuality through the work of public discourse and political practice.

Against the assimilationist egalitarian belief that only cultural uniformity is compatible with global socio-economic redistribution, I cited various attempts by the AGM to recognize a multiplicity of ways of being in the world. I also tried to show that acknowledging cultural pluralism in this way need not, as radical particularists would have it, result in political fragmentation or monism. As some of the AGM's initiatives suggest, global solidarity can be derived from transnational webs of affinity that are themselves formed out of individuals and groups participating in processes of discussion and argumentation aiming to negotiate a common political terrain. Finally, to the claim that cosmopolitanism can only be grounded in a minimalist universal consensus, I counterposed the AGM's support for a lived cosmopolitan culture that takes root in the creativity of socio-political activities such as public discourse and ritual performance.

Of course, none of this seeks to proclaim that the task of cultivating a version of cosmopolitanism out of the progressive strands of a still brittle global civil society is an easy one, nor even that the AGM is its ideal manifestation. Much remains to be accomplished, for the possible thickening of social, political and cultural ties between civic associations and concerned citizens will need to be porous and fluid enough to incorporate an ever-widening chorus of voices that can pose a credible alternative to neoliberal globalization. Cosmopolitanism from below is without bounds — but it is, just as significantly, without guarantees. It is built from the ground up, and remains a work in progress continually in need of being recreated and reimagined. No longer can transnational social relations be considered merely the product of naturalized essences, abstract norms, or institutional arrangements. As I have attempted to demonstrate here, all that is left are the efforts of human beings committed to each other and to the realization of a vision of a just and pluralist world. And yet this very fact, the socially self-constituting character of a different sort of cosmopolitanism, is the font of its robustness and vibrancy.

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