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**The Impacts of the Movement against Neoliberal Globalisation.
Institutional Reforms, a New Conception of Politics,
and Postcolonial Questions**

Aram Ziai

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Aram Ziai

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The Impacts of the Movement against Neoliberal Globalisation.

Institutional Reforms, a New Conception of Politics, and Postcolonial Questions¹

Aram Ziai

Abstract

This article discusses the protest movement against the neoliberal capitalist world order which emerged in the second half of the 1990s and was inspired by the Mexican Zapatistas. This movement was considerably globalised and, despite different currents, characterised by a pluralist and anarchist conceptualization of politics. The article argues that it partly succeeded in preventing further liberalisation of world trade and, above all, that it provoked numerous reforms in the global political economy institutions that were the targets of its critique. However, from a postcolonial perspective, the case of Jubilee 2000 demonstrates that the protest movement against neoliberal globalisation was not entirely free from paternalism and dominance in North-South relations, despite a heightened sensibility towards these phenomena.

Keywords: global protest, alterglobalisation, international financial institutions, reform, internationalism, neoliberalism, conception of politics, postcolonial critique, social movements

¹ A German version of this article appeared in PERIPHERIE Nr. 161, p. 12-42.

1 Introduction

In the article "WTO: Trump is only the executor of the anti-globalisation movement"², SPIEGEL columnist Henrik Müller - professor of business journalism at the Technical University of Dortmund, previously deputy editor-in-chief of Manager Magazin - argues that the "decline of the liberal world order", personified in Donald Trump, began with the globalisation critique of the late nineties and the "first major anti-globalisation demonstration" at the WTO summit in Seattle in 1999. Since then, multilateralism in general and the WTO, which according to Müller was supposed to "curb the economic superpowers and establish a fairer world economic order by enforcing general rules", had been destroyed. This thesis is problematic for at least two reasons.

On the one hand, the anti-globalisation protest movement of the 1990s was never - like Trump's supporters - against globalisation or multilateralism or liberalism per se, but against a neoliberal globalisation of the world economy in the interest of multinational corporations. The lack of differentiation between political liberalism (individual liberties) and economic liberalism (free trade) makes the opponents of a globalisation of the world economy - which in the face of global competition declares labour rights and environmental protection to be locational disadvantages - appear as opponents of freedom par excellence. Criticism of neoliberalism is thus reinterpreted as support for an authoritarian nation state, a figure of thought that interprets interventions in the market as an attack on democracy.

Secondly, the purpose of the WTO was never to "limit the rights of the strong", as Müller claims. On the contrary, it was a manifestation of the balance of power in world trade and enforced the rights of the strongest. This is visible in the fact that, unlike its predecessor, the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), it also included the area of services, which was particularly close to the hearts of the banks, insurance companies and businesses of the North. The WTO is committed to "non-discrimination", i.e. it is committed to equal treatment of local and foreign actors - even if the latter are disproportionately better funded and more competitive and push domestic competitors out of the market. This is also visible in the area of agricultural subsidies, which is important for the South, where the WTO promised liberalisation but de facto allowed the industrialised countries of the North to continue to protect their agriculture and their agricultural corporations from competition from the South with extensive payments

² <https://www.spiegel.de/wirtschaft/soziales/wto-donald-trump-ist-nur-der-vollstrecker-derantiglobalisierungsbewegung-a-d739c469-f646-45d5-b6fd-9bfcccc4cd54>, last accessed: 9.2.2020.

("green box" and "blue box") or even allowed them to dump exports (Lal Das 1998; Dunkley 2000). And even if China and a few emerging countries succeeded in setting in motion impressive world market-induced growth processes due to strategic economic regulation and a large domestic market (May et al. 2014), the liberal world trade order remains primarily a means of massively impeding industrialisation processes in the global South for the vast majority, despite unintended side effects (Chang 2003).

It could be argued³ that, in retrospect, right-wing national populists have capitalised on the criticism of the neoliberal world order. For reasons of space, a more detailed discussion of the topic must be dispensed with in this contribution, but Walden Bello (2004) discusses, among other things, how "the right has hijacked deglobalisation". It seems to me that the responsibility for the popularity of right-wing populist parties lies more with the social distortions caused by this order and also with the social democratic parties that support this neoliberal order - and not with the critics of this order. And it is precisely with regard to the question of democracy that the contrast between the grassroots protest movement and Trump's authoritarian nationalism could hardly be greater (as will be explained in the next sections).⁴ The fact that a respected weekly can claim unchallenged that the anti-globalisation protest movement prepared the ground for Trump indicates, however, that its actual effects are little present in the public. And even in academia, it can be noted that after numerous publications, especially in the early 2000s,⁵ only a few recent research studies can be found (e.g. Habermann 2014; Sen 2018 a & b) - and even their focus is mostly on the "heyday" of the summit protests in 1998-2001. This is certainly related to the fact that the protests against the world economic summits after the 11th September 2001 were thematically displaced by the global "war on terror" and restricted in terms of security policy. However, the between 50,000 and 75,000 people demonstrating for "borderless solidarity" at the G20 summit in Hamburg in 2017 indicate that their mobilisation potential is still relevant today. This is why the Hans Böckler Foundation-funded junior research group "Protest and Reform in the Global Political Economy from a Postcolonial Perspective" has taken up the topic.

³ I owe this hint to one of the two reviewer from the journal *Peripherie*.

⁴ Based on more than 3,000 representative respondents at the European Social Forum in Florence and the G8 protests in Genoa, the study by Massimiliano Andretta et al. (2003: 201) concludes: "Although concerns about the liberalisation of markets and the homogenisation of culture were and are also expressed in religious fundamentalism or conservative protectionism, this variety of critique of globalisation is not present in the movement, which on the contrary has a clearly left-wing profile". Only 0.4% of respondents indicated their political orientation as "centre-right" or "right-wing" and 0.8% as "centre" (ibid.: 200).

⁵ Abramsky 2001; Waterman 2001; Mies 2001; Bewernitz 2002; Mertes 2002; Walk & Boehme 2002; Attac Germany 2002; Grefe et al. 2002; Andretta et al. 2003; Klein 2003; Anand et al. 2004; Brand 2005; Marchart & Weinzierl 2006; Notes from Nowhere 2007; Maeckelbergh 2009.

Against this backdrop, the present article asks, from a distance of two decades after the aforementioned heyday, 1) how the global protest movement differs from earlier internationalist protest movements in terms of its understanding of politics and its decision-making processes, 2) what long-term effects the global protest movement has had on the global political economy and, in particular, on the institutions it criticises, and 3) from a postcolonial perspective, what power relations exist between actors from the North and the South within the movement. Before this, however, it is necessary to clarify what exactly is meant by the label of the global protest movement.

2 The globalised protest movement against neoliberal globalisation

As a reaction to the consequences of economic globalisation processes (see e.g. Stiglitz 2002; Chossudovsky 2002; SAPRIN 2004), a new worldwide protest movement emerged in the second half of the 1990s, only a few years after the "end of history" (Fukuyama) and the lack of alternatives to neoliberal capitalism had been proclaimed. These consequences were perceived by many people as a threat, as a threat to social and ecological standards or, especially in the North, to workers' rights that had been painstakingly fought for and that could no longer be "afforded" in the global competition between locations. Women were particularly affected by the effects of neoliberal reforms, as they had to compensate for the reduction of welfare state services by increasing reproductive work (Sparr 1994; Wichterich 1998). Accordingly, since the mid-1990s there have been protests in many places against the institutions of global economic policy, above all the World Bank, IMF and WTO, such as in Geneva 1998, Seattle 1999, Prague 2000, or Genoa 2001.⁶ The starting points were the protests in Washington in 1994 on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the World Bank ("50 Years is enough!", Danaher 1994) and above all the uprising of the Zapatistas against the Mexican government⁷ (which was also preceded by a revolution of women in the movement, Trzeciak & Meuth 2013). However, neoliberal policies also led to civil society resistance in Western Europe (Abramsky 2001) and societies of the global South. While the movement was initially called anti-globalisation movement ("No globals", Andretta et al. 2003), the term "alter-globalisation protest movement" increasingly prevailed, which more precisely captured the fact that the protest was not aimed at a fundamental return to the nation state, but was primarily opposed to neoliberalism

⁶ With movement research, one could speak of a protest cycle or a protest wave (Steinhilper & Anderl 2018: 307f).

⁷ REDaktion 1997; Brand & Ceceña 2000; Muñoz Ramirez 2004; Kerkeling 2006.

and global competition, but was otherwise very open to the world and called for "globalisation from below" (Boehme & Walk 2002: 9; Mies 2001).⁸

Transnational networks of this protest movement (sometimes also called "Global Justice Movement") can be seen in the worldwide coordinated protest actions against free trade and the *People's Global Action* (PGA) platform inspired by the Mexican Zapatistas, in the *Association pour la taxation des transactions financières à l'aide des citoyens*, Attac for short, and in the *World Social Forums* that emerged in Porto Alegre as a counter-proposal to the World Economic Forum in Davos.⁹

Movement researcher Dieter Rucht argues that the anti-globalisation protest movement emerged well before the 1990s (Rucht 2002a: 50, 2002b: 61-63). He justifies this by referring to protests that had been directed against G7 summits (20-30,000 demonstrators in Bonn in 1985) or annual meetings of the World Bank and IMF (80,000 demonstrators in Berlin in 1988) since the mid-1980s. This raises the question of how far we can speak of a new movement ten years later or whether we are not rather dealing with an older protest movement in the tradition of internationalism (Kößler & Melber 2002; Hierlmeier 2002; Fischer & Zimmermann 2008).

3 A new global social movement? Political understanding and decision-making processes

In spite of content-related affinities with the internationalist solidarity movement of the 1980s (and possibly also personal overlaps), I would like to argue, with Achim Brunnengräber (2006) among others, for the thesis of a new quality of the globalisation-critical protest movement: On the one hand, because technical progress enabled a much stronger global networking of the protest and thus a more globalised character of the movement. Through the use of new means of communication (internet, e-mail, mobile phones), the global networking of the actors within the movement had reached a qualitatively new level. The fact that on the first "Global Action Day", 16 May 1998, simultaneous and coordinated protests against neoliberalism and corporate-controlled globalisation as well as for self-determination took place in 49 cities all over the world from Ankara to Zurich was just as much a novelty as the fact that three months

⁸ The German website www.gegen-globalisierung.de, ("against globalisation") on the other hand, was run by the Neo-Nazi party NPD at the time.

⁹ Waterman 2001; Bewernitz 2002; Walk & Boehme 2002; Attac Deutschland 2002; Grefe et al. 2002; Andretta et al. 2003; Anand et al. 2004; Brand 2005; Marchart & Weinzierl 2006; Notes from Nowhere 2007; Habermann 2014.

earlier at the first PGA conference in Geneva 400 delegates from grassroots movements and non-governmental organisations from 56 countries met and voted on a manifesto of their network (Habermann 2014: 49, 42). The global character of the movement was shaped by the fact that in response to the shifting balance of power in the process of neoliberal globalisation, the institutions of the global political economy came into much sharper focus than before, calling for a democratisation of these institutions and global social rights (Maeckelbergh 2009: 9-11).

On the other hand, I would like to argue that the movement was characterised by an understanding of politics that can be described as committed to plurality and diversity; critical of hierarchy, vanguards and representation; and oriented towards grassroots democracy and consensus.

3.1 Acceptance of plurality and diversity

A characteristic of this global protest movement was above all the successful coalition of groups from different areas of civil society, of "Teamsters and Turtles", as the alliance of trade union and ecological groups was described in the anti-WTO protests in Seattle in 1999. For example The Canadian *Union of Postal Workers (CUPW)* was involved in the PGA, as was the Indian farmers' movement *KRRS (Karnataka Rajya Ryota Sangh)*, the Nigerian *MOSOP (Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People)* as well as the Brazilian landless of the *MST (Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra)*, Ukrainian environmentalists (*Mama-86*), French unemployed (*Agir Ensemble contre le Chomage*) and German anarchists (Habermann 2014: 39-53, 113). This also led to the epithet "movement of movements" (Mertes 2002; Sen 2018a & b) and went hand in hand with the rejection of the idea of a single identity, of a single opponent, and especially of a common political goal of the movement beyond the rejection of neoliberal globalization (Maeckelbergh 2009: 7). This was summed up by the formula "one no - many yeses" (Habermann 2014: 116; De Angelis 2005: 195). As a common positive denominator, therefore, could be outlined general objectives such as "reinventing democracy" (Graeber 2002) or "reclaiming the commons" (Klein 2003: 220). With Ulrich Brand, this can certainly be seen as a learning experience from earlier movements: "An important historical experience is that unifications of *the* movement itself lead to hegemonic relationships and thus exclusions." (2002: 120) The rejection of a uniform goal and the commitment to diversity and plurality is thus not postmodern randomness but a political statement.

At Attac, too (despite the name, which is geared towards the financial transaction tax), a thematic breadth and an ideological pluralism is part of the identity. The first sentence of Attac's self-conception reads:

"Those who participate in Attac can have Christian or other religious motives, be atheist, humanist, Marxist or adhere to and other philosophies. Attac has no binding theoretical, ideological, religious or worldview basis, and it does not need one. Diversity is a strength."
(Attac 2002: 12)

Both are at least as true of the World Social Forum, which sought to unite diverse groups and struggles. The first call of the Porto Alegre WSF proclaimed:

"We are women and men, peasants, workers, unemployed, professionals, students, black and indigenous, from the South and from the North, engaged in the struggle for human rights, freedom, security, jobs and education. We are fighting against the hegemony of the financial markets, the destruction of our cultures, the monopolisation of knowledge, mass media and communication, the degradation of nature and the destruction of the quality of life by multinational corporations and anti-democratic policies." (in: Anand et al. 2004: 142)

The diversity of different social struggles in the anti-globalisation protest movement went hand in hand with the acceptance of different priorities and political world views and, notwithstanding this, the will for political cooperation on the lowest common denominator:

- a fundamental rejection of neoliberal globalisation,
- the minimum demand for democratic self-determination of those affected and
- criticism of the lack of accountability of the organisations and regulatory systems of *global economic governance*.

Beyond this, however, a distinction must be made between more pragmatic-reformist parts of the movement (more likely to be found in Attac) and undogmatic-anti-capitalist parts (more likely to be found in PGA). A third, distinct current can be found in the more traditional Marxist organisations (*Socialist Worker's Party*, in Germany mainly *Linksruck*), which have also become involved in the movement. Accordingly, the alternatives to neoliberalism also went in different directions: in the direction of "deglobalisation" (Bello) or a decoupling from global capitalism, a "globalisation from below", and a social democratic re-regulation and democratisation of the existing institutions of the global political economy (Rucht 2002b: 58f; Ruggiero 2002: 57).

3.2 Skepticism towards hierarchies, avant-garde politics and representation

Even if this point is certainly not valid for all actors within the anti-globalisation protest movement, the widespread deep scepticism towards hierarchies, avant-garde politics of political representation is another feature that distinguishes the movement from most of the previous ones. There is no umbrella organisation of the globalisation-critical movement with elected representatives. PGA was founded decidedly as a network, at best as a common platform, and in the "Hallmarks" (basic principles) it was stated: "PGA is a coordination tool, not an organisation. It has no members and is not legally represented. No organisation or person can represent PGA." (cited in Habermann 2014: 47) Attempts by a parliamentary group to establish binding structures and spokespersons within the framework of the World Social Forum also proved to be highly controversial and met with great resistance. According to its Charter of Principles, the WSF refuses to be "a body representing world society" or to be "authorised" to "represent positions on behalf of all participants". Rather, it is "a diversified, non-sectarian, non-governmental and non-party space" that is "open to plurality and to the diversity of activities and commitments of organisations and movements", but also "of genders, ethnicities, cultures, generations and physical abilities" (WSF Charter of Principles, in Anand et al. 2004: 118f).

In addition to the commitment to plurality, this also manifests a mistrust of the principle of representation, which is a cornerstone of the liberal understanding of democracy: According to this principle, democracy consists in the election of leaders whose political decisions on behalf of the electorate are considered to represent them and thus as legitimate. Equally rejected is the Marxist-Leninist idea of a vanguard which, as a communist party, represents the interests of the oppressed classes (known to it), with or without a democratic mandate. Brunnengraber therefore describes the movement "in large parts as critical of domination" (2006: 23). Based on an empirical study in Austria and Italy, Oliver Marchart & Hubert Weinzierl attest to the protesters' that a "radical democratic self-image seems to be largely part of the consensus" (2006: 11). This manifests itself in a skepticism towards a model of politics based on the principle of representation (the "speaking for others", Ziai 2018) and the change of society "from above", by taking over the state.

In the absence of a political perspective that follows the classical models of reform or revolution aimed at parliamentary or violent takeover of the state apparatus, a model of change manifests itself that relies on social change from below rather than from above. This is linked to the rejection of a vanguard politics, as was the case with the communist parties in many socialist

states, which claimed to be better informed about the interests of the members of the movement (in this case the workers) than the workers themselves. The counter-model outlined here has been put into a formula by the political scientist John Holloway, who is close to the movement: "Change the world without taking power" (2002).

3.3 Grassroots democracy and consensus orientation

According to a widespread understanding in the protest movement, the world should be changed from below, in a grassroots democratic way, and in view of the plurality of world views, it should not be oriented towards a universal concept of society. According to the claim of "prefigurative politics", in which political goals are also reflected in the choice of means, large parts of the movement accordingly tried to make processes of internal decision-making as grassroots and consensus-oriented as possible. Marianne Maeckelbergh (2009) makes this clear in her ethnographic study of the European Social Forums (ESF) in 2003 and 2004, the World Social Forum in 2004 and the G8 summit protests in 2003, 2004 and 2005. Her central conclusion is that this movement is developing a new understanding of democracy through participatory decision-making processes informed by anti-authoritarian ideas of the 1960s and new social movements and built on diversity, horizontality and consensus (ibid.: 4, 13-19, 35-38). The focus is not on achieving a political goal, but on the participatory, consensus-oriented and diversity-recognising political process in the course of which this goal will emerge gradually (ibid.: 75f, 89).

The study shows, on the one hand, in the context of the ESF, how much resentment can cause a hollow, only formal or even forced consensus (ibid.: 79, 103), but also in the context of anti-G8 mobilisation, how participatory procedures can lead to a consensus that is actually supported by all, explicitly bypassing representatives who decide for the movement what is to be done, and despite political differences. For example, the controversial question of whether the radical summit opponents of Dissent! should appeal for the "Make Poverty History" demonstration, which was organized by NGOs (and considered the G8 as not fundamentally illegitimate), was clarified effectively and without conflict within a short period of time by means of decentral group discussions, collection of ideas, reporting delegates and proposals that were brought back to the small groups. After a joint counter-event, the part of the movement that considered it important to support the broad demonstration was able to participate in it, but signalled its dissent by not following the required dress code (colourful instead of white clothes) and own

flyers with the slogan "Make Capitalism History". All participants were able to voice their concerns, constructively influence the process and support the decision (ibid.: 146-151).

But the insistence on inclusion, consensus and grassroots democracy is not only found in the PGA spectrum (to which Dissent! belongs). The commitment to non-hierarchical decision-making and participatory democracy is also part of the WSF statement of principles (Anand et al. 2004: 199). And Attac also tends to reflect the horizontal, grassroots form of organisation, as Vincenzo Ruggiero ("The structure of the association/ movement, in effect, reflects the logic of electronic networks, with Attac [being] less a hierarchical federation than a peers' association", 2002: 51) and Marcos Ancelovici (2002: 440f, 448) emphasise.

These three points (acceptance of diversity and plurality; rejection of hierarchies, vanguards and representation; grassroots democracy and consensus orientation) similarly reflect two related but distinct theoretical-political debates: that on New Internationalism and that on Zapatismo. The debates on internationalism familiar to the "movement veterans" led to the adoption of certain dogmas in the 1990s at the latest:

Firstly, the belief in the main contradiction and the revolutionary subject, i.e. a group whose oppression is privileged in the sense that (due to social contradictions and mechanisms) its abolition is central to the creation of a freer society – which is opposed to an acceptance of diversity of the oppressed and the equivalence of different relations of domination. Secondly, the belief in emancipatory change through taking over state power on the basis of a blueprint for a better society and objective knowledge about the interests of others and the common good - which corresponds to a rejection of hierarchies, representation and vanguard politics according to a conventional political model. Thirdly, the belief in universal processes of progress, modernisation or "development", which always place societies and liberation movements in the South in a lagging, backward position and prescribe a clear political goal - which is as opposed to a diversity of goals as it is to an open, participatory decision-making process.¹⁰

Within the alterglobalisation protest movement, however, the slogans of the Zapatistas, which were often used for political positioning, were much more popular, especially among younger people: "A world in which many worlds fit in" strengthens the acceptance of diversity; "We go forward asking questions" expresses the lack of a fully formulated plan for improving the world and the commitment to doubt and discussion (and thus the rejection of avant-garde politics); and "We don't have to conquer the world. It is enough to create it anew" distances itself from the perspective of changing society by taking over the state apparatus, and "We walk at the pace

¹⁰ Foitzik & Marvakis 1997; Redaktion Alaska 1998; Hierlmeier 2002; BUKO 2003.

of the slowest" can be interpreted as a rejection of avant-garde models and a commitment to inclusion and consensus orientation.¹¹

These three principles of a new understanding of politics (diversity, globality, rejection of vanguard politics) justify, in my opinion, speaking of a new, independent movement in contrast to older internationalist movements, of a new or even "postmodern" (Redaktion Alaska 1998)¹² anarchist, postcolonial or Zapatista internationalism (Kastner 2011), regardless of all the undoubted continuities with earlier protest movements.

4 Successful Protest? Reforms of the institutions of the global political economy

So what about the successes of the alterglobalisation protest movement and shaped by this new internationalism? The demand for the abolition of the World Bank, IMF and WTO, for the disempowerment of the corporations and for the cancellation of Third World debt have obviously not been fulfilled. On closer inspection, however, the crude common sense of "it all didn't help, those at the top do what they want anyway" does even less justice to the effects of the movement than David Graeber's euphoric diagnosis that the movement achieved its goals in record time (Graeber 2007).¹³ In fact, the movement has initiated numerous reform processes and halted some processes of neoliberalisation.

This section will provide an overview of such reform processes in the world economy, especially in the institutions attacked by the global protest movement, which were presumably initiated as a reaction to these attacks. However, it is difficult to prove this connection in a scientific way. A dissertation dedicated to this question states: "The most difficult part is demonstrating that an assumed response was indeed caused by the social movement" (Kolb 2007: 23). The criticised institutions will only very rarely admit that they tried to weaken the protests and restore their damaged legitimacy with the reforms. The conclusion is obvious and the academic literature also assumes this connection (O'Brien et al. 2000), but precise proof is still lacking. Felix Kolb (2007: 28) distinguishes five levels with regard to the influence of social movements:

¹¹ REDaktion 1997; Brand & Ceceña 2000; Brand 2002; Muñoz Ramirez 2004; Kerkeling 2006; Kastner 2011.

¹² The editors of Alaska (1998: 223) distinguish here between a postmodern and a new internationalism on the basis of a "modern" conception of emancipation (radical break between existing relations and liberated society in which relations of domination no longer exist, liberation as the release of something that already exists and is not shaped by relations of domination, etc.).

¹³ See also the June 2007 issue of the movement magazine *Turbulence*, entitled "What would it mean to win?"

1. that of agenda setting,
2. that of the substantive proposals with regard to the agenda,
3. that of the political decisions on the proposals,
4. that of the implementation of the decisions and
5. that of public goods as a result of implementation.

Based on this analytical grid, the following section will take a closer look at some reforms that presumably emerged as a reaction to the demands of the alterglobalisation protest movement.

4.1 Structural adjustment reform and debt relief in the World Bank and IMF

At the 1999 Cologne G7/G8 Summit, as part of the expansion of the debt relief initiative for *highly indebted poor countries (HIPC-II)* and in response to long-standing criticism of the controversial structural adjustment programmes, it was decided to link debt relief to a reform of these programmes. From now on, the economic policy conditionalities of World Bank and IMF lending - even beyond the HIPC II initiative - should be oriented towards the principles of poverty reduction, participation and ownership. In plain language, poverty reduction strategies (*Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers, PRSPs*) developed by the governments of the recipient countries with the participation of civil society were to be the condition not only for far-reaching debt relief, but also for concessional loans from the World Bank (BMZ 2002). That structural adjustment should serve the goal of poverty reduction and strengthen social programmes instead of cutting them is a clear turnaround in the policy of the *International Financial Institutions (IFIs)* compared to the 1980s, as illustrated by the criticism of a UNICEF study of its effects at the time (Cornia et al. 1987; see also Sparr 1994). And the fact that ownership and participation instead of dictates from Washington should guide the creation of economic policy reforms is also a completely new principle compared to the hitherto less democratic dealings with borrower countries.

However, research has shown a clear influence of the IFIs on the preparation of the PRSPs: Walter Eberlei & Thomas Siebold claim that the role of the IMF and the World Bank in this process "can hardly be underestimated" (2002: 42). This seems to require explanation, since officially no interference from these institutions in the respective participatory processes is envisaged. However, the two institutions have made it quite clear to the governments of the countries concerned (e.g. through a manual on PRSP preparation) which economic policy measures are considered sensible in Washington and which are not. A finance minister of an African country put it quite openly: " We prefer to pre-empt them by giving them what they want before they start lecturing us" (cited in World Development Movement 2001: 7). Even

civil society in one African country, for example, refrained from proposing economic policy measures that were known to meet with little approval in Washington (such as measures to protect local agriculture or the textile industry) (cf. Eberlei & Siebold 2002: 43). That is to say, the power relations in the political economy ensure a neoliberal character of the PRSP even under the conditions of formal "ownership" by the governments and participation of civil society. The focus on poverty reduction did indeed take place, but in the form of social policy programmes while retaining basic neoliberal principles. David Craig & Doug Porter call this "inclusive liberalism" (2005).

As far as the HIPC-II debt relief initiative is concerned, it should first be noted that it was much more far-reaching than all the previous ones and for the first time also included debts to the IFIs - although it was still far from sufficient. However, at least after its renewed extension to the MDRI (*Multilateral Debt Relief Initiative*) at the G8 summit in Gleneagles, a noticeable reduction of the debt burden was initially achieved for a number of indebted countries. However, more than a partial and temporary solution cannot be expected without the involvement of global trade policy (Kaiser 2014).¹⁴

With regard to the influence of the protest movement, it should be noted that it extended to at least three levels: not only was it possible to put a reform of structural adjustment on the agenda, but the content of the reform proposals and the political decision in favour of far-reaching debt relief, poverty reduction, participation and ownership also clearly bear the signature of the critics of globalisation. On the fourth level of implementing decisions, the new principles are not just empty rhetoric, but the reform has changed little in terms of enforcing neoliberal principles in poverty reduction programmes. It is therefore unclear to what extent one can actually speak of success at the fifth level.

4.2 Inspection Panel of the World Bank

In response to an international protest campaign by civil society actors against the Narmada dam project in India (and under pressure from the US Congress), the Inspection Panel of the World Bank was established in 1994 as an independent body to which those affected by World Bank projects can lodge complaints if the institution does not comply with its environmental

¹⁴ Mindful of this, the 1953 agreement on debt relief for the FRG contained a clause linking debt service payments to a trade surplus - this gave creditors an incentive to buy exports from the debtor country (Jubilee Debt Campaign 2015).

and social standards. The Inspection Panel, which is independent of the management and president of the World Bank, prepares investigation reports on the disputed projects, which are then submitted directly to the Executive Board, which can then demand improvement measures or, in extreme cases, impose a project stop (Shihata 2000). The international campaign was initiated by the Indian organisation *Narmada Bachao Andolan* under the leadership of Medha Patkar, which was also part of the networking within the global protest movement (Habermann 2014: 89).

Until then, the World Bank had always claimed that the borrower (in this case the Indian state) was solely responsible. However, the persistence of the protest campaign, the Morse Report, which outlined the catastrophic effects of the dam project, and the resulting pressure from the US Congress caused the World Bank to relent. The introduction of a mechanism that offered those affected by World Bank projects a possibility to sue was a drastic innovation in international law. All the more so because most other multilateral development banks followed suit and also established accountability mechanisms (van Putten 2008).

In the political science literature, however, it is not undisputed how effective this accountability mechanism, which is highly innovative for international organisations, ultimately is. Although concrete improvements (e.g. introduction of civil society consultations, payment of compensation to displaced persons) have been made in a number of cases in response to complaints by affected persons and investigation reports by the Inspection Panel, only in a few individual cases have the criticised projects actually been stopped. And the decisions are always reserved for the Executive Board of the World Bank, there is no provision for an appeal by the complainants.¹⁵ Also, in response to competition from the *Asian Infrastructure and Investment Bank* (AIIB) and the *New Development Bank* (NDB), there has been a softening of the World Bank's social and environmental standards under the *safeguard review* (Horta 2015).¹⁶ Nevertheless, protest has led to the creation of an effective institutionalised accountability mechanism for project-affected people. And even though development projects still lead to displacement by the millions, projects as catastrophic as the Narmada Valley Development Dam project are now virtually excluded from the World Bank through this mechanism. The influence of the protest movement here again extended to at least the first three levels (agenda-setting, content proposals, political decisions). Here, too, the fourth level of implementation is

¹⁵ Fox & Brown 1998; Clark et al. 2003; World Bank Inspection Panel 2009; Daniel et al. 2016; Ziai 2016; Pereira et al. 2017; Schäfer 2019.

¹⁶ See the Civil Society Statement on the October 31 Decision of the World Bank's Board of Directors on the Review of the Inspection Panel's Toolkit from 2018.

contested. At the fifth level, at least a limited gain in the public good of democratic accountability cannot be dismissed.

Further reform processes at the World Bank, which can be seen as a reaction to the global protest movement, refer to the regulation and the extractivism sector in the Extractive Industries Review (Anderl 2017) as well as the broad study "Voices of the Poor" (Reiff 2021, p. 43ff). In a broader sense, the establishment of the Millennium Development Goals in 2001 could also be interpreted as an attempt to restore the legitimacy of the UN system and the IFIs, which had been tarnished by the protests.

4.3 TRIPs reform in the WTO

The Agreement on *Trade-related Intellectual Property Rights* (TRIPs) has been a binding part of the World Trade Organisation's treaty system since its foundation in 1995 and requires member states to implement protection mechanisms for patents in national law (Dunkley 2000). In the field of drug patenting, there was no patent protection at all in about 50 countries before the TRIPs Agreement, and only limited patent protection in numerous other countries (e.g. in India, patents were only granted on manufacturing processes, but not on end products). As a result, medical care in these countries could be provided much more cheaply by generic drugs ("replicas" of the original drugs). As a result of the WTO TRIPs Agreement, in many countries without their own pharmaceutical industry, recourse to generics was made considerably more difficult or prevented altogether, which made the treatment of AIDS patients in particular 35 to 100 times more expensive. Although limited exceptions were made for compulsory licences (production of patented medicines without the permission of the patent holder) and parallel imports (import of cheaper original medicines from other countries), the industrialised countries put pressure on the peripheral countries not to make use of this right to compulsory licences - successfully. The USA, on the other hand, has already used compulsory licensing more than 100 times. After an international campaign initiated by the South African Treatment Action Campaign had organised protests and built up pressure, a declaration on TRIPs and public health was adopted at the WTO Ministerial Conference in Doha in 2001, which expressly confirmed and established as legal exemptions from the TRIPs Agreement in the event of a national health emergency.¹⁷

¹⁷ Frein & Reichert 2003: 17; Frein & Reichel 2000: 26; Jenkes 2000; Schaaber 2001; Fischer 2003: 27.

The patent regime was one of the focal points of the protests against the WTO, on the one hand because of the patenting of seeds, and on the other hand because of the pharmaceutical patents described above. The global and, above all, the South African protests have led to pressure on the governments of peripheral countries to make concessions in the WTO to the OECD governments in the Doha Declaration (against which pharmaceutical companies have tried in vain to sue). Even though it must be pointed out that contrary to the demands of the protests, the TRIPs Agreement and thus the global patent regime in the interest of the multinational pharmaceutical companies remained untouched by the Doha Declaration, one can still speak of a partial success of the movement. The influence of the protest movement again extended to the three levels of agenda setting, alternative proposals and political decision-making. Here, too, the level of implementation was contested, but in South Africa in particular, a noticeable improvement in the supply of antiretroviral drugs for AIDS patients was a clear success on the fifth level of public goods.

4.4 State insolvency procedure in the IMF

Already in the course of the debt crisis of numerous countries of the global South in the 1980s, in which the IMF and the World Bank increasingly exerted global influence on economic policy through structural adjustment loans, there were calls for a regulated sovereign insolvency procedure. This was supposed to replace the creditor-dominated procedure in the Paris Club and ensure that insolvent states would continue to be able to fulfil their social obligations towards their citizens - which was all too often not the case during the debt crisis. Even a report by UNICEF (Cornia et al. 1987) found that austerity policies aimed at meeting the demands of creditor banks were carried out on the backs of the low-income populations of the respective countries, and in many places infant mortality had increased and life expectancy decreased. In this context, the IMF had always rejected demands for a limitation of debt service by debtors and for a sovereign insolvency law. However, after the sometimes massive summit protests of the 1990s (and in particular the riots on the Annual Meeting in Prague in 2000), civil society demands for a *Fair and Transparent Arbitration Procedure* (FTAP) were taken up in the IMF in 2001 with the proposal of a SDRM (*Sovereign Debt Restructuring Mechanism*) (Krueger 2002). The SDRM process outlined by the IMF Deputy Director is not quite the same as the FTAP demanded by civil society, but recognises that the IMF as a creditor cannot take on the role of arbitrator and delegates the decision on the extent of debt relief to an (unspecified) independent body. Also, the review of all creditor claims at the beginning is mentioned as an

element of the procedure. The fragmentation of debt negotiations into different forums is recognised as a problem, as is the need for a temporary debt service moratorium (Schneider 2002; Hersel 2003; Ambrose 2005: 282ff). However, even the proposal for such a moderate SDRM was rejected by a majority of IMF Executive Directors in spring 2003, interestingly also by some representatives of the global South (Kellermann 2006, Chapter V). The pressure of the financial markets, which would punish the mere possibility of sovereign insolvency with interest surcharges, played a major role here (Ziai 2012).

Even in the IMF, the organisation in the global political economy which was most insensitive to the protests, the movement succeeded in putting the issue of state insolvency on the agenda. The differences between SDRM and FTAP, however, point to the contested nature of the proposals at the second level, as well as to the fact that the problems with rogue creditors were an important trigger for the IMF to take up the demand. On the third level of political decision-making, it then became apparent that the influence of the banking lobby was superior to that of the global protest movement.

4.5 Financial transaction tax („Tobin Tax“)

Also directed against the influence of banks and investment funds was Attac's core demand for the "disarmament of financial markets" by introducing a financial transaction tax, also called the "Tobin Tax" (TT) after its inventor James Tobin. In order to curb speculation in financial markets and prevent crises, cross-border currency transactions should be subject to a small tax – well below 1% but high enough (proposals range from 0.01 to 0.5%), to make short-term speculative financial transactions that seek to profit from minimal exchange rate differentials unprofitable. TT revenues could then be used to finance poverty reduction according to a UNDP proposal (Huffs Schmid 2002: 233ff; Jetin 2012).

Due to the resolute resistance of the banking lobby and, as a consequence, also of the US and British governments, an international consensus for the TT could not be reached. Despite the rejection of the Ministry of Finance, the *German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development* (BMZ) commissioned a feasibility study in 2002 - with the argument that it was a source of financing for development cooperation - which came to the conclusion that an EU-wide introduction of the tax would be feasible without major problems (Spahn 2002). The governments of France and Belgium expressed their support for the foreign exchange transaction tax relatively early on, and in 2005 German Chancellor Schröder surprisingly announced (also against the explicit advice of the finance minister) that he was also open to it

(Fues 2005). After the 2008 financial crisis, NGOs were even able to get the IMF to take a serious look at the TT. A corresponding study by the IMF also came to the conclusion that the tax was certainly feasible, but due to the influence of the US Treasury Department, another instrument to stabilise the markets was favoured. In 2009, both the German Social Democrats and conservative Chancellor Merkel spoke out in favour of the tax, but at the G20 summit in Toronto in 2010, the USA, Great Britain, Australia, Canada, India and several other emerging countries remained opposed. On the initiative of Germany and France (under pressure from a civil society campaign and with the support of some other countries and the EU Parliament), the EU Commission presented a proposal that led in 2013 to negotiations between eleven EU members on the introduction of a TT via the so-called Enhanced Cooperation Procedure, which enables a "coalition of the willing" even without consensus between the EU member states (Wahl 2014: 4-7). However, these have not been concluded to date.

Similar to the SDRM, the protest movement succeeded in putting the issue of the financial transaction tax on the IMF's agenda (first level) and influencing the substantive proposals (second level), but at the level of political decision-making the influence of the banking lobby was more effective. This is similarly true in the EU arena, where a decision to introduce the tax has not yet been taken despite promising approaches. The fact that the Attac project is now being promoted in a number of EU member states (including the heavyweights Germany and France) shows that its influence has been successful at the third level, but these successes at the national level have so far remained ineffective due to the supranational structure of the EU.

Beyond these reform initiatives, however, there are other cases in which the protest movement was able to prevent agreements that would have furthered neoliberal globalisation. In Kolb's analytical framework, the influence here extended at least to the level of political decision-making, even if the movement was not involved in the political process as a designer but as a veto player. In both cases, however, the lobby of the world market-oriented capital faction succeeded in shifting its concerns to the agenda of other agreements.

4.6 Prevention of the Multilateral Agreement on Investment (MAI)

The most spectacular case is certainly that of the *Multilateral Agreement on Investment* (MAI). After it became apparent within the WTO that a far-reaching investment protection agreement (envisioned in the Uruguay Round and the first ministerial conference in Singapore) would fail due to the resistance of the countries of the South, the USA and the EU shifted the corresponding

negotiations to the OECD. The intention for this shift was to be able to pass an agreement within this framework that contained the highest possible standards and could achieve worldwide validity in the medium term – and (according to WTO Director-General Renato Ruggiero) function as a "constitution of the world economy" (Tielemann 1999: 4; Mies & Werlhof 1998a: 7). Key elements of the agreement included protection for investors from state requirements (e.g. obligations to qualify local labour or to use local suppliers) as well as the possibility to sue states for compensation for indirect expropriation (investor-to-state dispute settlement, ISDS) – which potentially included any laws that resulted in a reduction of the investor's profit expectations (McDonald 1998: 633; Mies & Werlhof 1998b: 15f). After a draft treaty was made public in 1997 by the NGO *Public Citizen*, a broad civil society protest campaign emerged in many countries, which was part of the anti-globalisation movement. It was so successful that many parliamentarians and some governments such as France and New Zealand joined the opposition to the MAI and the agreement had to be declared a failure in the autumn of 1998. Ministries involved in the negotiations pointed out that existing disagreements had been significantly exacerbated by the protests (Kobrin 1998: 99; Tielemann 1999: 8).

Although attempts were made to put the issue of investment protection back on the WTO agenda, this was unsuccessful. Instead, some MAI clauses (including ISDS and "indirect expropriation") found their way into numerous bilateral investment agreements. As part of the TTIP (*Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership*), however, the regulatory bans on states and legal action for companies once again met with massive civil society protest, including in the form of 150-250,000 demonstrators in Berlin in October 2015. After Trump took office in 2016 - and here we do find a small argument for the otherwise implausible thesis of the Spiegel article mentioned at the beginning - the negotiations were put on hold. However, some social scientists argue that Trump was merely the final nail in the coffin and that the negotiations were already frozen and doomed to fail due to the protests and the massive delegitimisation of the agreement, especially in the German public (Soendergaard 2020: 286).

4.7 No further round of liberalisation in the WTO

Almost as remarkable as the case of the MAI, however, is the fact that the WTO's round of negotiations, which began at the fourth ministerial conference in Doha, Qatar, in 2001, has still not been concluded. Only a small part of the Doha Agenda was adopted at the ninth Ministerial Conference in Bali in 2013. The other six ministerial conferences since Doha have largely come to nothing. This led to talk of a WTO crisis a decade ago (Baldwin & Evenett 2011) - and the

situation has not improved since then. On the contrary, some observers see the WTO as increasingly meaningless because of this standstill. The reason for the WTO's inability to successfully conclude the Doha Round of negotiations for almost two decades now is essentially a stalemate between countries of the North and the South. A stable coalition of representatives of the South refuses to negotiate further liberalisation steps until the North finally makes tangible concessions (already announced in the Uruguay Round) in the area of agricultural subsidies (Chorev & Babb 2009: 477). This is largely due to the fact that since the late 1990s the protests against neoliberal globalization have put the delegates of these countries under corresponding pressure, or that they have adopted the position of the anti-globalization protest movement (Rucht 2002b: 60). However, the countries of the North did not deviate from their position (successful in the Uruguay Round) of agreeing to a negotiating package only if it was geared to the interests of “their” companies. Informally, some complained that the delegates from the South had been incited by demonstrators and NGOs (Jawara & Kwa 2003; Ziai 2007 Chapter 8). It seems that the global protest movement has successfully blocked further liberalisation agreements in the WTO since 2001. However, bilateral or regional free trade agreements (partly containing ISDS clauses) have been concluded during the same period.

In contrast to the reform processes, the prevention of an expansion of neoliberal globalisation can be considered an unbridled success of the movement. In the case of the reform processes, it would have to be examined in more detail to what extent the progress achieved can be outweighed against the processes of co-optation and pacification of movement actors and NGOs (see also Anderl 2017, Reiff 2021). These processes, especially the integration of NGOs into a regime of global economic governance, can be analysed as a transformation of statehood (see Brand et al. 2001). Some NGOs ask (in military vocabulary, but quite self-critically) whether the big war for global justice is not lost in the focus on the small skirmishes of reforms (Bendana 2006: 4).

5 Postcolonial perspective: critical inquiries

If the main concern of a postcolonial perspective is to examine colonial continuities¹⁸, the question must also be asked with regard to the alterglobalisation protest movement to what extent it is shaped by global asymmetries of power and constructions of the Other from the era of colonialism.

¹⁸ Kerner 2012; Conrad et al. 2013; Castro Varela & Dhawan 2015; Ziai 2016.

It is not possible to carry out a systematic study of this issue at this stage. In the literature there are (usually rather anecdotal) references. Some say yes, citing the clear over-representation of white Western Europeans in the European Social Forum (Maeckelbergh 2009: 134), the co-optation of anti-globalization groups by capitalist elites (Young 2014: 381, see also Anderl 2017) or the exclusion of the radical network of groups of colour “Wretched of the Earth” from the People’s Climate March of Justice and Jobs in London 2015 (Görlich & Habermann 2018: 321f). Others point out that in the context of the WSF and in particular PGA (Habermann 2014) explicit attention was paid to preventing a dominance of northern actors. An avoidance of paternalism in the North-South context was also evident in the quote by Aboriginal activist Lilla Watson, which stood at the beginning of the PGA manifesto: “If you only come to help me, you’re wasting your time. But if you come because your liberation is linked to mine, then let’s work together!” (cited in Habermann 2014: 46)

At this point, only one case study will be examined in more detail: the international campaign for debt relief under the name "Jubilee". This achieved a mobilisation of millions of people for debt relief of the Tricontinental countries, especially in the run-up to the G8 summits in Cologne in 1999 and Gleneagles in 2005, which achieved a partial debt relief of highly indebted low-income countries (Keet 2000; Kaiser 2014). As explained above, this was linked to a reform of the structural adjustment programmes and is generally regarded as one of the important successes of the global protest movement. However, in the course of this campaign, there was a conflict and ultimately a split under the name "Jubilee South".

This arose due to differences in content between the participating (mostly movement-related) organisations in the South and those in the North, which tend to be more oriented towards professional lobbying. The former raised far more radical demands: at the regional meeting of African campaigns in Accra in April 1998, they demanded an end to debt service payments and reparations for the slave trade, colonialism and neo-colonialism. At the meeting of Latin American and Caribbean campaigns in Tegucigalpa in January 1999, they also spoke of the historical debt of the North, not the South (Keet 2000: 463). This gave rise to the slogan "don't owe, won't pay". In general, the legitimacy of debt was fundamentally questioned and many campaigns of the South demanded a complete, unconditional cancellation of debt. Debt relief was not enough and the world economic system that produced inequality and poverty should be put to the test (Collins 1999: 420f; Bendana 2006: 8f; Somers 2014: 88).¹⁹

¹⁹ See also <http://www.jubileesouth.net/>, last accessed: 2.9.2020.

These demands, which were clearly articulated at the only joint international campaign meeting in Rome in 1998, were subsequently disregarded by the participating organisations from the North in favour of much more moderate demands for debt reduction and debt relief, or at best used as a threatening backdrop against creditor institutions to push through more moderate demands (Keet 2000: 462f; Somers 2014: 89). The lack of a structure for the international Jubilee 2000 campaign allowed the national campaigns with the most resources (those from the North, especially the UK and Germany) to dominate. The proposal for a democratically constituted International Steering Committee was rejected by the British campaign as utopian. In the end, the campaign goals were informally defined by the actors from the North (which was also admitted by some of these actors) (Somers 2014: 85).

In the context of the Cologne G8 summit, some of the Northern NGOs also adopted the rhetoric of the World Bank and the IMF regarding "debt sustainability" and tried to improve the HIPC debt relief initiative – which, however, only provided for debt relief for 21 of the poorest countries and also tied it to structural adjustment conditions. The distance became particularly clear in the discursive framing of the debt issue between North and South at the Cologne summit itself: instead of "don't owe, won't pay", some Erlassjahr supporters wore the slogan "And forgive us our debt, as we forgive Africa its debt" on their T-shirts (personal experience). The debt relief initiative adopted at the summit included the long-criticised link to neoliberal policies as well as to a decision by the IFIs on whether the poverty reduction strategies envisaged by the government were sound. The conditionally positive assessment of this initiative by the British campaign director to the media was not agreed with the campaigns of the South and was perceived as patronising (Somers 2014: 86).²⁰ Based on the experience that their demands were not taken seriously and were watered down in the international Jubilee campaign, Jubilee South was founded in October 1999 by about 150 activists from the Tricont (Ambrose 2005: 275).

While it should be borne in mind that this conflict was also about a conflict between radical social movements and movement-oriented organisations on the one hand and professional, lobbying NGOs on the other, the dominance and paternalism of actors from the North over actors from the South in the Jubilee campaign can also be interpreted from a post-colonial perspective as a colonial continuity. Even if this case is not necessarily representative of the alterglobalisation protest movement as a whole, it is clear that even under the slogan "another

²⁰ It is interesting in this context that the person in question presents himself as the leader of the Jubilee 2000 campaign ("I led a campaign, Jubilee 2000,..." <https://www.annpettifor.com/about/>, last accessed: 2.9.2020).

world is possible” power relations can sometimes be reproduced in the existing colonially shaped world.

6 Conclusion

At the end of this article it should have become clear that the analogy to Trump in no way does justice to the movement against neoliberal globalisation. Even compared to earlier internationalist movements, it is characterised by a more grassroots and anarchist understanding of politics. It has initiated an impressive series of reforms in the institutions of the global political economy (also in the account presented here, which is not comprehensive) and prevented a further advance of neoliberal globalisation in important respects – and incidentally led to the most diverse experiences, processes of reflection and politicisation among the people involved. However, it is not entirely free of neocolonial relations of dominance between actors from the North and the South. And certainly, when appreciating its successes, one must at the same time consider the extent to which reforms also often serve to demobilise and pacify social movements by ruling classes and institutions. Nevertheless, this should not prevent us from interpreting the concessions achieved as successes of the movement, at least if we follow David Graeber's understanding:

"[...] there are no clean breaks in history. The flip side of the old idea of a clean break, the one moment when the state falls and capitalism is defeated, is that anything short of that is not really a victory at all. [...] To me this is absurd. [...] Presumably any effective road to revolution will involve endless moments of co-optation, endless victorious campaigns, endless little insurrectionary moments, or moments of flight and covert autonomy." (Graeber 2007: 407)

Revolution in the sense of a fundamental emancipative social change, which also means "changing the everyday life of each and every one of us" (A. Titze),²¹ is then to be understood as the sum of many individual social struggles, reforms and incomplete progress, no longer as a turning point in history that makes all power relations disappear (Gibson-Graham 2006 [1996]; Redaktion Alaska 1998) – as "work in progress".

²¹ See also the *cultural-politics* approach, Escobar & Alvarez 1992.

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