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## 5 Division of labor and partnerships in transnational social movements

Observations of North-South and South-South interactions at the World Social Forum

*Hélène Baillot, Isaline Bergamaschi and Ruggero Iori*

### **Abstract**

This chapter explores the asymmetries – of power, of access to resources and leadership – at work between and amongst transnational social movements. On the one hand, the purpose of this chapter is that of analyzing the actual structures of inequality that emerge among the members of the alter-globalist movements. On the other, it investigates the explicit strategies deployed by the movements themselves in order to deal with, and tackle, these inequalities between participants. By looking at the 2011 WSF of Dakar, the chapter offers an analysis of the “division of labor” – i.e. the distribution of social roles – within the alter-globalist movement, and of the interactions between activists and organizations from the North and the South. In order to achieve this goal, it considers the cases of North-South partnerships between European and African organizations, as well as cases of South-South cooperation by looking at the forms of engagement between Latin American activists and their African counterparts.

This chapter is based on a twofold hypothesis: first, that the alter-globalization movement continues to be permeated by unequal access to resources and responsibility, and second, that the boundary between North and South is one of the main dividing lines within the movement (Smith, 2002; Pommerolle and Siméant, 2008b; Baillot, 2010). These inequalities are clearly revealed in sociological analyses of how North-South networks and partnerships between activists actually work and of major international activist events aimed precisely at displaying the truly global, representative character of the movement.

Slightly less than half of the activists interviewed at the World Social Forum in Dakar belong to a transnational network (45%). In all, 37% (380 respondents) declared they were members of a North-South international network and 16% (145 respondents) a South-South network. What does

“becoming internationalized” mean for an organization or an activist from the North? Does it mean the same thing for a militant from the South? What can a sociological analysis of the actors tell us about the way in which forms of domination are reconfigured in transnational networks? We find these questions particularly relevant because this aspect is so frequently eluded in the discourse produced by alter-global militants.

In scholarly work, few attempts have been made in this direction, but in our view they have not been entirely successful (Smith, 2002; Kwon, Reese and Anantram, 2008; Pommerolle and Siméant, 2011). In a recent article, Janet Conway (2011) uses the notion of “contact zone” to highlight the influence of (post-)colonial identities and inequalities at work in international social events such as the WSF. The article does not specify, however, how the identities and social roles determined by the categories of “North” and “South” are actually constructed. Rather than analyze what Conway calls the “coloniality of power,” we prefer to study the North-South division of activist labor, its resilience and manifestations. This chapter will thus examine the categorizations of “North” and “South” and how they were reproduced, negotiated and perhaps called into question at the WSF in Dakar.

Our approach here is both qualitative (interviews, workshop observations) and quantitative (statistics derived from survey questionnaires collected during the event). We will begin by examining how activists present themselves and how “partnerships” between organizations of the North and South are managed within the alter-global constellation (Sommier, Fillieule, and Agrikoliansky, 2008). We will show how the asymmetries and inequalities between Forum participants are manifested according to the participants’ continent of origin, using the examples of CRID,<sup>1</sup> ATTAC,<sup>2</sup> and CADTM,<sup>3</sup> three French organizations and networks that helped to create the

1 The CRID, or Centre de recherche et d’information pour le développement (Center for Development Research and Data), founded in 1976, is a French federation of 53 international solidarity associations representing Christian, Third World, alternative media, and post-1968 anti-imperialist leftist movements including the CIMADE (a French NGO focused on migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers), the CCFD (Catholic Committee against Hunger and for Development), Secours Catholique (Caritas), and Peuples Solidaires (ActionAID).

2 ATTAC, or Association for the Taxation of Financial Transactions and for Citizen’s Action, created in France in 1998, is now an international network present in 40 countries. Its original aim – to introduce a tax on financial transactions – fits into a broader perspective of regulating and controlling “globalization.”

3 CADTM, or the Committee for the Abolition of Third World Debt, founded in Belgium in March 1990, is a single-issue association seeking total and unconditional abolition of the debt of the countries of the South. Today it is an international network comprising forty member organizations.

alter-globalization movement.<sup>4</sup> We will then analyze South-South interaction, one of the striking features of the 2011 WSF event. We will examine the forms of legitimation, the resources, and the methods adopted to build these partnerships, which claim to be both alternative and horizontal. Our findings show that hierarchical ranking has also affected so-called South-South cooperation, which has consequently had trouble establishing itself as a more horizontal, egalitarian alternative, particularly for African activists.

### 5.1 Acting “on behalf of” or acting “with.” Methods of North-South cooperation at the Forum

In this first section, we will reconstruct the approaches to the division of labor between activists of the North and South and the dynamics of internationalizing the networks and organizations under study here. What are the various methods used in North-South cooperation within the alter-global movement? How can we account for the inequalities between their participants?

#### **How do North-South asymmetries manifest themselves in international activist networks?**

On Sunday evening, February 6<sup>th</sup>, the CRID organized a welcome party to mark the opening of the Forum. The reception, which was planned from France, was held in one of the comfortable hotels in the tourist district of Ngor, where the French delegation was staying. After an introductory speech by the president of the CRID, highlighting the “French” delegation in Dakar, the other members were invited to introduce themselves. The French associations were the first to address the group after the president. When it came turn for the partner organizations of the South to speak, time was almost up and the CRID’s Director General tried to speed up the pace. One after another the “partners” went before the microphone to quickly state their organization’s name and country of origin: “Asia... Latin America... go ahead.” The African members were the last to go on stage in a room that was by then almost empty. Outside, around the pool, the buffet was being served.

The second example testifies to a more diffuse form of domination. It is 5 p.m. on February 10<sup>th</sup>. Twenty-five militants belonging to the ATTAC

4 The choice of French-speaking organizations is justified by the fact the WSF was held in Dakar, where the French delegation was the second largest, after the Senegalese.

International network were meeting under an open tent to discuss the events of the WSF. One militant from ATTAC France expressed her pleasure at the progress made by the organization: ties between the partners had been strengthened along with the group's visibility by running a common stand and demonstrating together during the Forum's opening march. A member of ATTAC Burkina Faso raised a delicate point. There was indeed an ATTAC stand that had been manned by numerous Forum participants, but the name "ATTAC France" was printed in large characters on the banner of their shared tent. Murmurs could be heard throughout the tent. Several members of the French branch, clearly embarrassed, apologized: they had recycled used material without paying attention to the name. To solve the problem, it was suggested that the word "France" be cut out of the banner. The logo and the single name ATTAC would symbolize the network's new international character.

These anecdotes may seem trivial but they are symptomatic of the problems that arise in transnational activist organizations. The way such networks operate is often very different from the image and angelic principles of equality, solidarity and common cause associated with them. In practice, they are marked by profound inequalities in the information, resources and responsibilities given to the participants. What we see emerging here are elements of an international division of labor between activists of the North and the South.<sup>5</sup>

The actions, words, and experiences of participants in international militant networks are permeated by North-South inequalities, which are apparent in several revealing mechanisms. In strictly quantitative terms, we observed that the "bulk of the troops" representing the three networks and organizations at the WSF were from the North. The French part of the CRID delegation was twice as large as that of the southern partners: 320 French members compared with about 150 partners. The CRID thus gave the impression it was truly and officially a "French" delegation, which pleased the organization, even though it repeatedly emphasized the importance of its foreign partners. The overrepresentation of members from the North was not always quite so pronounced: only some 30 of the 150 CADTM delegates in attendance at Dakar came from Europe.

From a more qualitative standpoint, the organization and proceedings of the workshops tended to reflect and consolidate existing inequalities. This was evident in concrete, logistical procedures, which, though seemingly unimportant, actually make up the day-to-day work of militants. For

5 On the division of activist labor, see Sawicki and Siméant, 2010.

example, the ATTAC Africa members had drawn up a mailing list called “the ATTAC Africa list.” The members of the ATTAC France network distributed the same list under the same name because they wanted to focus more on African topics. In the eyes of the African activists, the two lists interfered with each other and “severely impeded [their] work,”<sup>6</sup> which is why several of them asked to have the French list eliminated. The ATTAC Africa list also created problems from a more symbolic point of view. One of the ATTAC Burkina activists explained that, “for communication to take place, we need a relationship between ATTAC Europe and ATTAC Africa, not between a country and a continent. ATTAC France was the first, but we don’t want a leader. Today, ATTAC Germany has more members than ATTAC France.” In the case of the CRID, the logistical skills of its delegations were highly valued amid the widespread disorganization of the Forum; their workshops were planned a month before the Forum by one or more French organizations, with the CRID overseeing coordination and preparatory meetings. During the feedback phase after the return from Dakar, many French participants emphasized that they felt like they were taking part in “a forum within the forum.” The CRID’s foreign partners were less enthusiastic, however: in the “evaluation” forms distributed by the CRID at the end of the Forum, they criticized the highly centralized preservation of an exclusive inner circle of Franco-centric activists.

Observations of the workshops also revealed a North-South division of discourse. The Western members adopted an academic, “scientific,” or expert form of discourse, even though the content was often political. The participants from the South talked about specific examples, usually derived from their home country or even their personal experience. This occurred in the workshop on the volatility of commodity prices, co-organized by the association *Les Amis du journal “la Vie”*<sup>7</sup> in which several, mostly older CRID members sporting badges on their T-shirts took part. The workshop, organized in French, resembled a summer university seminar with its standardized discourse and diligent note taking. The non-French-speaking partners of the organizing associations remained on the sidelines; the Senegalese activists took the floor to provide concrete examples. The audience was enthusiastic and responded with hearty applause.

The division of activist labor into “expertise” and “testimonials” is a pattern in the North-South asymmetries within militant movements.

6 Observation at the WSF of the meeting of ATTAC groups on February 10<sup>th</sup> at 5 p.m.

7 *La Vie* is a left-of-center Catholic weekly founded in France in 1945.

Does it stem from the participants' profiles? A sociological analysis shows that even when participants from southern countries possess considerable social capital (compared with the population of their home countries), they are still at a disadvantage compared with their counterparts from northern countries, which may explain why they have fewer responsibilities in the network in general and in forum organization in particular.

**Table 5.1 Profile of the actors from the West (North American, Europe) and the South (Latin Americans, Africans, Asians) present at the Forum according to their membership in a North-South transnational network**

	<b>Members from the North who belong to a North-South network (N = 156)</b> %	<b>Members from the North who do not belong to a North-South network (N = 206)</b> %	<b>Members from the South who belong to a North-South network (N = 202)</b> %
<b>University-level studies</b>			
Master's or doctoral degrees	75	60	42
<b>Occupations</b>			
Tradesmen, shopkeepers or small employers	4	1	4
Managers or liberal professions	58	46	46
Mid-level occupations, technicians or foremen	26	31	31
White-collar workers	3	4	3
Blue-collar workers	4	3	4
Agricultural workers	2	1	1
Students	4	14	8
<b>Social background (according to the father's occupation)</b>			
Tradesmen, shopkeepers or small employers	11	13	12
Managers or liberal professions	45	36	18
Mid-level occupations, technicians, foremen	13	19	15
Working classes	31	25	54
Fluency in a foreign language	71	69	53
Experience abroad	63	60	52

Read as follow: 75% of the respondents from the North belonging to a North-South network declared they had received a graduate degree, compared with 60% of the respondents from the North that do not belong to a North-South network and 42% of the respondents from the South belonging to a North-South network.

Source: WSF Survey, Paris1-UCAD-UGB, 2011.

Activists from the North belonging to a North-South network form an elite within the Forum: 89% of them have studied at the university level and have a college diploma. They are better educated than Western respondents that do not belong to a North-South network. From an occupational standpoint, managers and liberal professions appear to be overrepresented in this group compared with those who do not belong to a North-South network (58% versus 46%). Access to a World Social Forum through membership in a North-South network is not reserved for the affluent classes: 31% of the respondents come from the working classes.<sup>8</sup> The Western members of North-South networks, like the rest of the northern participants, show a strong tendency towards internationalization, demonstrated by their linguistic capital and experiences abroad. Nearly two-thirds have already lived in a foreign country, most of them for over a year.

We find the same characteristics, but to a lesser extent, among the militants of the South that belong to a North-South network. Among this population, the managers and liberal professions make up 46% of the activists, and mid-level occupations 31%. Furthermore, 71% have studied at university and 42% have a graduate degree. They also tend to be internationalized: 53% speak at least one foreign language, two-thirds speak two or more. Half of them have had the experience of living abroad. These survey respondents therefore also have substantial educational, economic, and linguistic capital. They nevertheless differ from their northern counterparts in several ways. First of all, fewer of them continued their studies beyond the undergraduate level (42% compared with 75% of the northerners). Second, fewer southern activists work as managers or in the liberal professions than the northern participants in North-South networks (46% versus 58%). Finally, whereas the majority of activists from the North come from middle or upper class backgrounds (58%), those from the South generally come from working class backgrounds (54%): more specifically, 21% declare their fathers are farmers, 18% white-collar workers and 15% blue-collar workers.

Though the sociological profile of activists from the North and South is an important aspect, it is not enough to explain the continuing division of labor between network members, with the least attractive tasks assigned to those from the South. To find a fresh perspective and new insight to help us understand North-South asymmetries within the alter-global

8 10% did not reply. We included white-collar, blue-collar and agricultural workers in the working class category. We did not include the mother's occupation in the analysis due to the very high percentage of no-replies (40-60%).

movement, we will step back for a moment and examine the causes and logic of internationalizing activist organization.

### **Understanding North-South modes of cooperation. A look at the internationalization strategies of the networks and organizations**

The North-South division has been a characteristic of, and challenge for, the WSF and the transnational activist movement in general. “While the WSF is in general seen and projected as a ‘project of the South’ (primarily since its formal founders were a group of eight Brazilian organizations and its first meetings were held there),” Jai Sen, an activist and writer of Indian origin, reminds us that “we also need to recognize all its roots, some of which lie in the internationalist North, and not politically romanticize it as exclusively being ‘an arrow from the South’” (Sen, 2013). Like international organizations or businesses, transnational social change groups “work within institutional structures and cultural frameworks that inhibit efforts to fundamentally alter structural power relations,” and the North-South divide has been a major obstacle to the movement’s transnational organization (Smith, 2002: 506 and 508).

Sharing values and a common cause is a core principle of many international solidarity organizations. Yet the phenomenon of NGOs’ and associations’ internationalization must also be seen from the angle of political economy, i.e. as one effect among others of competition and changing sources of funding (Siméant, 2005). Internationalization is one of the strategies available to associations to remain viable in the face of competitors or even to get ahead of others by operating on a transnational scale. This is the case for certain actors in the French world of anti-establishment organizations such as the CRID or the CCFD: following the internal repositioning of French associations in the field of development during the 1990s, these groups decided to invest their time and energy at the international level in the struggle “for an alternative world” (Agrikoliansky, 2005).

The transnational strategies of NGOs and international solidarity organizations were also prompted by financing needs. Since the 1990s, European and multilateral institutions have become increasingly substantial donors to NGOs to help them promote “international civil society”<sup>9</sup>. At the same time, the organizations are more and more systematically required to demonstrate partnerships with actors in the South to obtain public funding. For example, half of CADTM financing in 2009 came from subsidies provided by the

9 On the impact of funding structures and opportunities on NGOs’ strategies, see Lang 2013.

Belgian Directorate-General of Development Cooperation (DGDC), which reports directly to the country's Ministry of Development Cooperation since 1998. The DGDC focuses on four types of action: funding partners in low-income countries; raising the awareness of the Belgian population about development problems; offering services to support organization work or local partners; and personnel cooperation (providing development workers, scholarships, internships). Hence, having partners established in the South has become an indispensable ingredient in the development strategies of certain Belgian organizations. One fifth of CADTM funding received from the DGDC is allocated exclusively to "strengthening the network." The CRID delegation, whose participation at the WSF was financed in large part by the French Development Agency (AFD), has had to meet similar conditions in terms of its composition and representation. Thus, the number and role of partners at the WSF was repeatedly underscored at internal meetings in France because they were key factors in presenting the organization and becoming eligible for funding: the phrase "the CRID derives its legitimacy from its partners..." became a leitmotiv.

For many organizations of the South, setting up partnerships with northern NGOs is the only way of obtaining financing, in the absence of subsidies from their own governments.<sup>10</sup> Of the African respondents belonging to a North-South network,<sup>11</sup> 68% declared that all or part of their travel expenses had been funded. For 47%, financing is an essential dimension of North-South collaboration. Opportunities for training, travel, and attending meetings are eagerly sought after. According to the African respondents, the main activities of the network are: the exchange of information (79%), travel (69%), training (67%), and awareness campaigns (70%). Slightly more than half the southern participants declared they had come to the Forum to make contacts (53%).<sup>12</sup>

North-South partnerships should not be viewed solely in terms of the dispossession or dependence of southern actors. Indeed, even when such partnerships are unequal, they still afford African participants considerable opportunities and resources, which can be reinvested in the activist field at home, as Jean-François Bayart's notion of "extraversion" (1999) emphasizes.

10 Smith (2012: 512) has also shown that the scarcity of resources, knowledge base, and social capital in the global South is an important aspect of the North-South divide within transnational social movement organizations.

11 They represent 47% of the members of a North-South network and 33% of the African survey population (N=177).

12 Compared with 42% of the African respondents that do not belong to a North-South network. Chi-Square Test significant at a threshold of 5%.

Partnerships also appear to be a route to emancipation, first by overcoming national or continental boundaries (funding from “parent” organizations is mainly intended to pay for airfare to attend international meetings). For example, the airline tickets of the CRID delegates from the South and most CADTM delegates to the Forum in Dakar were largely financed by the AFD and the Belgian DGDC, respectively. The example of Samir, a young student activist in ATTAC Togo, demonstrates the multiple opportunities that open up for individuals who “go into” international activism: participation in a militant event offers a chance to meet others, make contacts and thereby generate new opportunities for funding, travel, and further encounters. During the year 2009, Samir attended the ATTAC-Europe meeting in France, a European Union conference in Brussels, the Conference on Climate Change in Bangkok, and the Conference of African Environment Ministers in Addis Ababa, as well as meetings in Montreal, Mexico, and Dakar to prepare the 2011 WSF. Without a doubt, Samir is now a member of the “jet set” of the global justice movement (Sulmont, 2004). Indeed, he fits the bill perfectly: he has solid university training, speaks fluent French, and demonstrates consummate skill in militant rhetoric. This example is a reminder that making connections at the international level requires certain faculties, whether financial, social, or cultural, which are not available in equal measure to everyone in the transnational activist world. Participating in the WSF hence appears as a learning process (Sen, 2013), especially for those who have the skills to learn.

This trend is confirmed by a comparison between the African survey respondents belonging to a North-South network and the other African militants that took part in the Dakar Forum. The percentage of managers (or liberal professions) and mid-level occupations (41% and 32%) in the first group is higher than in the second group of activists (31% and 21% respectively).<sup>13</sup> Among the Africans belonging to a North-South network, 68% have at least a college degree, 59% speak one or more of their country’s languages, including an international language (Spanish, English, Portuguese, Arabic, French, or Chinese) and 53% have already lived abroad.

Furthermore, playing a dual role (Agrikoliansky et al. 2004; Agrikoliansky and Sommier, 2005), which is quite common among transnational militants, is essential for the southern partners and carries more than financial benefits. By belonging to several organizations, they can “shop around” among northern “parent” organizations for the best offer, i.e. the one that will give them the most advantages. For example, at the ATTAC debriefing after

13 Chi-Square Test significant at a threshold of 1%.

the Forum, the problem of the group's relationship with the CADTM came up. A member of ATTAC Germany expressed a desire to see ATTAC Africa members become more involved in the activities and marches organized by the ATTAC network. An activist from ATTAC Burkina Faso explained: "*You're wondering why ATTAC Africa members were not with you? It's because they were with the CADTM, because they have a very well organized network. They even stay at the same hotel.*" Indeed, for the opening march, a large majority of ATTAC Africa members from partner organizations in Togo, Burkina Faso, Ivory Coast, and Morocco had joined up with the members of the CADTM, an organization to which they also belong. About 150 of them were gathered together at the end of the march, galvanized by hip-hop songs from the album *Globalisons les résistances* and chanting slogans shouted out by a member of ATTAC Burkina. The ranks of the CADTM had thus swollen during the opening march, at the expense of the ATTAC network.

Many northern militants are conscious of the asymmetry existing within North-South networks and they are counting on the situation to evolve: a transnational network can only be built over the long term. This is the view shared by the members of CADTM Belgium, who have adopted a pro-active approach, through their international secretariat, to encourage training for members from the South.

Not all the organizations manifest the same degree of lucidity about the tendencies towards inequality that threaten to undermine them. The survey shows that the steps taken by members of North-South networks have yielded mixed results: 43% of the militants of the South think the North-South network to which they belong does not operate in an egalitarian fashion. Among them, 38% go as far as to say there is a major contradiction between the principle of equality invoked by the organization and the way it functions in practice.

## 5.2 South-South interactions at the WSF: another kind of cooperation?

So-called South-South cooperation was one of the salient themes of the WSF organized in Dakar.<sup>14</sup> In 2009, the CACIM (India Institute for Critical Action: Centre in Movement) hoped that Dakar would be "a New Bandung of the

14 The role of global South-based regionalisms in counter-hegemonic initiatives and the global justice movement more broadly has been highlighted by Smith and Wiest, 2012, chap. 3, pp. 73-4, 85, 92.

People.”<sup>15</sup> In an interview with *Femmes d’Afrique* in Dakar, Demba Moussa Dembelé (Reality of Aid), a member of the Senegalese organizing committee of the WSF, supported South-South cooperation insofar as “it calls into question the traditional type of cooperation, which is merely an instrument of domination by the Western powers” (Bach, 2011). Did the WSF in Dakar signal the burgeoning of a “different kind of cooperation,” an alternative that could overcome the limits of North-South cooperation? Or, on the contrary, did it reproduce the same pitfalls, first and foremost the asymmetry between participants according to their region of origin? Our analysis is based on a sample of 145 respondents belonging to a South-South network.<sup>16</sup>

### South-South networks: more inclusive, more participative?

Membership in an international network, whether North-South or South-South, appears to be socially selective. The middle and upper classes are overrepresented in these networks in relation to the total African survey population: they make up two-thirds of the African members of international networks compared with half of the rest of African population interviewed at the Forum.<sup>17</sup>

The sociological profile of the African members of South-South networks appears to rank higher on the social scale than that of their counterparts in North-South networks. In terms of social background, the activists whose fathers are managers or exercise a liberal profession are more numerous in the South-South networks (27% versus 18% of the African members of North-South networks, most of whom come from the working class). They are also better educated than those belonging to North-South networks: 53% of those in South-South networks have graduate degrees compared with 40% of those in North-South networks. 56% of them are engaged in management or a liberal profession versus only 41% of those in North-South networks, whereas the latter are found more frequently in mid-level occupations (31% versus 23%).<sup>18</sup> Similarly, the African members of South-South networks have a privileged situation in their organizations, since at the time of the survey they were more frequently salaried employees of an organization (49%) than their counterparts in North-South networks (37%).

15 Rabia Abdelkrim Chikh, “WSF 2011 in Senegal,” CACIM, May 2009: [www.cacim.net/twiki/tiki-index.php?page=MultilogueWSF2011Note](http://www.cacim.net/twiki/tiki-index.php?page=MultilogueWSF2011Note), consulted on January 10, 2013.

16 76% (N=110) came from Africa, 21% (N=31) from Latin America, and 2% from Asia and the Middle East (N=4).

17 Chi-Square Test significant at a threshold of 1% in both cases.

18 Chi-Square Test significant at a level of 1% in both cases.

**Table 5.2 Profile of the African respondents according to their membership in a North-South or South-South transnational network**

	Militants belonging to a North-South network (N = 214) %	Militants belonging to a South-South network (N = 110) %
<b>University-level studies</b>		
Master's or doctoral degree	40	53
<b>Occupations</b>		
Agricultural workers	2	1
Tradesmen, shopkeepers, small employers	4	4
Managers and liberal professions	32	56
Mid-level occupations, technicians and foremen	31	23
White-collar workers	3	4
Blue-collar workers	6	1
Students	11	11
– Employed by an NGO (currently or in the past)	37	49
<b>Social background (according to the father's occupation)</b>		
Tradesmen, shopkeepers, small employers	13	9
Managers and liberal professions	18	27
Mid-level occupations, technicians and foremen	16	16
Working classes	52	48

Read as follows: 40% of the African respondents belonging to a North-South network declared they had received a graduate degree compared with 53% of the African members of a South-South network.

Source: WSF Survey, Paris1-UCAD-UGB, 2011.

The South-South networks therefore appear to be more selective, less inclusive and less accessible to African militants. This has not kept the members of South-South networks from participating more actively in the WSF: with higher qualifications, they are perhaps more at ease in public speaking, argumentation, and debate at an international event. For example, at a workshop on ties between social movements and political parties, organized by the Secours Catholique but moderated by African and Latin American “partners,” members of Senegalese far left parties, the Maghreb Social Forum, and the Frantz Fanon Circle demonstrated their erudition in references to literary and militant texts. Due to the topic, the workshop attracted left-wing and far left intellectuals from North

and sub-Saharan Africa engaged in political and trade union struggles. This politicization generated complicity between the African and Latin American participants.<sup>19</sup> It enabled the African participants to do more than merely offer testimonials as victims or project beneficiaries (which they tend to do in North-South workshops) and assume a more militant role, expressing broader, more universal aims (i.e. not rooted exclusively in their daily reality and environment).

The specificity of South-South interactions also hinges on the resources mobilized by certain southern militants that have helped to create the image of a South united in solidarity opposite the “North.”

### **A South united in solidarity? Shared identity as a method of legitimation**

Some southern activists attempted to assert a shared identity. The topic of Afro-descendants was widely exploited by several Latin American delegations, which gave them a connection to a forum in Africa. The historical and cultural link between the two continents served as a slogan for Colombian, Venezuelan, and Brazilians in the workshops.

It was February 7, 2011, in a workshop entitled “Migration is a Human Right,” co-organized by the CCFD. A Colombian activist said he was very happy to be there, to share with Africa, and added: “*We Latinos, we have the privilege of having an African culture in our countries. It is the result of a crime against humanity and slavery that brought over twenty million people, but it is also a source of great cultural richness.*” In several activities, the Latin Americans addressed the African public as “*hermanos, hermanas*” (“dear brothers and sisters”), and referred to Africa as “*mama Africa.*” A sort of brotherhood was professed and exalted. All the Latin American participants we interviewed said it was their first trip to Africa. An Afro-Venezuelan participant claimed to have had a mystical experience when he visited Gorée<sup>20</sup> with his delegation prior to the start of the Forum.<sup>21</sup> Similarly, cultural heritage was used to build a common identity in mobilizing festivities and emotions. Venezuelan, Brazilian, and Senegalese percussionists gave performances on the first and last days of the WSF: it was a genuine process of “festive diplomacy” that attracted an audience that extended beyond Forum participants.<sup>22</sup>

19 On this topic, see the chapter by Bergamaschi, Navarro, and Nez in this book.

20 An island off the coast of Dakar and symbol of the deportation of African slaves to the Americas.

21 Conversations with a Venezuelan militant. With Héloïse Nez.

22 On the role of emotions and “affective reactions that predispose those who experience them to become involved or support a particular cause,” we might mention the work of Christophe Traïni on “devices for raising awareness” (Traïni, 2009:13).

When the Latin Americans were not claiming a common identity, they sought to generate complicity with the African public by highlighting shared experiences: migration, racism, racial discrimination, and the injustices suffered by black populations outside Africa. In the workshop on migration organized by the CCFD and led by its Latin American partners, a Brazilian anthropology professor in jeans and a black shirt with African print introduced himself as a “son of the diaspora” and went on to give a lengthy description of the situation of the sixty million blacks in Brazil and the “chromatic division” of wealth in the country. In some of the North-South workshops mentioned earlier, the role of bearing witness was often reserved for African speakers and audience members to inform or raise the awareness of the Europeans in attendance. In the CCFD workshop, however, the testimonial role was embraced by a Latin American speaker and directed to a predominantly West African audience (Malian and Burkinabe) to create a feeling of kinship. In his speech, he relied much more on his own experience of discrimination and poverty than on scientific or statistical expertise, an approach he claimed was necessary in view of the opposition between the developed world (in this case France) and developing countries. By addressing the audience in French, he transformed what would normally have been an obstacle (his mediocre ability to speak French) into an asset: *“I don’t speak the language of Molière but I am happy to use the language of the street, because my French is not academic and I can speak with everybody, taxi drivers and others.”*

The interaction observed during this workshop was interesting in several respects. The Africans who were present were a “captive” audience: they were partners mobilized by the CCFD, each one wearing a little blue scarf draped over the shoulder bearing the emblem of the host organization. The initial atmosphere – scholarly and studious – gradually loosened up and the audience expressed their approval of the speakers in a variety of ways (laughing, nodding, throat-clearing, applauding, and expressing thanks at the end); they took notes constantly and asked a lot of questions about various aspects of political, economic, and social life in Latin America.

A great deal of South-South interaction was also driven by issues concerning the South as a mirror of the North, the uniqueness of the South in relation to the North (Europe, United States) and criticism of the North. Such discussions ended up producing a uniform image of the South characterized by weak institutions, informality, lack of coordination of initiatives, etc. During the workshop on the link between political parties and social movements, a Colombian militant asserted that activism today must look to Latin America and Africa for critical mass and innovative capacity

because *“in Europe, people have become conservative. Their struggle consists in protecting the welfare state and entitlements acquired in the past.”* At the end of the workshop on ALBA (Bolivarian Alliance for the Americas),<sup>23</sup> representatives of various southern countries identified with the topic of Western anti-imperialism. Several Venezuelan workshop organizers talked about the attempts fomented by the US government to destabilize the Chávez regime. The workshop ended with a long pro-government speech by an Ivorian participant who drew an implicit analogy between French neocolonial interventionism in Ivory Coast and American imperialism in Latin America. The mobilizing effect of his words was in direct proportion to the superficial nature of the analogy: the audience improvised and chanted a slogan: *“Solidaridad con la Costa de Marfil!”* (“Solidarity with Ivory Coast!”). All the same, the need to respect the specificity of national struggles and trajectories (i.e. political experiences in Latin America and the “Arab Spring”) and avoid imposing models of activism was asserted several times during the workshops and discussions between southern activists.

On other occasions, cooperation between governments and social movements of the South was perceived and promoted as a source of alternatives to the North-South system. During the workshop on ALBA, a Senegalese militant called for greater cooperation between Casamance and Venezuela – “close to each other in blood and skin” – at the governmental and social movement levels. He recommended, for example, the creation in Dakar of an *“organization to defend the left-wing South”* in which *“ambassadors of the South (Brazil, Cuba, India, Russia) would come together (...) against the IMF and the World Bank.”*

Nevertheless, despite calls for unity and common cause, our observation of the WSF in Dakar reveals that the fragmentation of the South also engendered a hierarchical order among participants.

### **A fragmented South: controversies and hierarchical effects**

The expression “South-South cooperation” should not obscure the fact that the South is increasingly fragmented. Determining who belongs to the South and who is or is not authorized to speak on its behalf was an issue in discussions held in Dakar.

23 ALBA, launched in April 2005 by Cuba and Venezuela, was conceived as a regional alternative to the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) promoted by Washington.

Between heads of state: some of the remarks made by Lula, the former president of Brazil, at a meeting on February 7<sup>th</sup> held in the Place du Souvenir, irritated the Senegalese President Abdoulaye Wade (a long-standing opponent of the Socialist party), who refused to be lectured by “emerging” Brazil.<sup>24</sup> Between militants: the possibilities for stepping up exchanges between movements and countries in the South aroused debate because some were suspected of being exploitative relationships. In Dakar, Demba Moussa Dembelé, a member of the Senegalese WSF Organizing Committee, and Ndiakhate Fall, secretary of the Union of Peasant Groups of Méckhé (UGPM), expressed their concern and issued a warning about the seizure of land accompanying Chinese intervention in sub-Saharan Africa (Bach, 2011). Similarly, in several workshops, Senegalese participants sharply criticized the attempts to import an agricultural system based on Brazilian *latifundios* in northern Senegal. The criticism then took on an anti-imperialist tone (calling the system an imposed model, poorly adapted to African realities), similar to the tone used in condemning the practices of the countries and multinational companies of the North, and the Senegalese government was also blamed for its weakness in the face of such practices.

The fact that certain countries are considered to be “emerging” in global economic and institutional arenas has had echoes and repercussions in the world of transnational activism. According to Fatima Mello, the transformation of Brazil from a country receiving aid into a donor country has led to changes (and greater fragmentation) within national social movements (Mello, 2011: 2). In addition, due to their country’s new international status, some Indian activists feel they have been invested with special mission within the alter-global movement “to influence economic policies in favor of promoting alternatives that would serve the interests of peoples.”<sup>25</sup>

Other participants acquire a feeling of superiority. Rabia Abdelkrim Chikh (ENDA)<sup>26</sup> thinks the World Social Forum in Mumbai in 2004 was “the best organized of all” and members of the Indian organization CACIM have called into question the ability of Africans to mobilize and organize. For example, they accused Kenya, the host of the WSF in 2007, of lacking a “culture of mobilization,” expressed doubts about the suitability of the African continent for organizing WSFs and expressed “various concerns” when the international committee announced that Senegal had been chosen to

24 *Le Quotidien*, February 8, 2011, p. 12.

25 Cf. the CACIM website, particularly: Rabia Abdelkrim Chikh, “WSF 2011 in Senegal,” *op. cit.*

26 The Environment and Development of Developing Countries is an NGO founded in 1972 and based in Dakar, Senegal.

host the WSF in 2011.<sup>27</sup> By doing so, they reproduced towards Africans the lack of trust in Indian capacities that South American organizers expressed when it was announced that the 2004 WSF would be hosted by India (Sen, 2013). In Dakar, the Venezuelan delegation's youth movement representative declared that if "*it was hard in Caracas because it rained a lot,*" "*it's worse here,*" not due to the weather but to lack of organization; at the end of the Forum, incidentally, his delegation called for "stronger, better organization of the event" in the future.

In the same vein, during more informal discussions at the Dakar WSF, South American participants were rather pessimistic about the social movement in Africa: a Colombian participant and the LGBT representative from the Venezuelan delegation said they were shocked by the lack of civil society mobilization, the ignorance, the "manipulation of minds," and the "mental colonization" prevalent in Senegal. On the sidelines at the workshop entitled "Facing the Challenges of the Present and the Future: How Well is the World Social Forum Doing?" held on the last day of the Forum, a South African activist attributed the poor organization of the 2011 Forum to the apathy of Senegalese civil society, in contrast to the involvement of the Kenyan organizers in Nairobi in 2007. His comments bring out the cleavages between countries and civil societies on the African continent along two main dividing lines already observed at the 2007 WSF in Nairobi (Pommerolle and Siméant, 2011): the first contrasts South Africa, the regional economic and political giant, also known for its dynamic social movements and ability to mobilize its trade unions, with the economically "least advanced" African countries that are dependent upon international aid and in a situation of extraversion, such as Senegal. The second distinguishes between English- and French-speaking countries and movements, which promote different conceptions and practices of collective action and establishes a hierarchy between them.

### **More egalitarian networks? Division of labor and feeling of equality in South-South networks**

South-South activities and networks are finding it hard to challenge the division of activist labor and overcome the stumbling blocks traditionally associated with North-South interaction. In certain concrete "cooperation" situations they reveal an inability to eliminate entirely the (real or supposed) inequalities between their material conditions and those of African

27 Rabia Abdelkrim Chikh, "WSF 2011 in Senegal," *op. cit.*

participants. This was the case, for example, with a professor of Spanish at Cheikh Anta Diop University, who gave valuable support to the Venezuelan ambassador to Senegal, but whose role at the Forum was confined to logistics (preparing, running, and tidying up the stand) and translating from Spanish to French at workshops. At the press conference organized by the Venezuelan delegation on the last day of the Forum, two Senegalese and a Cape Verdean expressed their desire to see the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) provide more funding and called for greater collaboration and “strengthening of capabilities.” Such appeals to Latin America reflect the fact that South Americans continue to be perceived much the same way as northern organizations and activists – namely, as potential donors. They also indicate the prevalence of old reflexes and the assimilation of the distribution of roles and ways of being and interacting acquired in North-South cooperation, particularly in the sub-Saharan context. In some workshops, by the way, African militants referred to Latin America as part of the North and, in the course of a conversation with a Mexican member of the survey team, southern activists told her they consider her as being from the West.

These observations appear to be confirmed by the analysis of the replies to quantitative survey questions concerning the feeling of equality in network operation. Among African members of North-South networks, 60% declared the network functioned in an egalitarian manner, 26% thought that it tried to do so but sometimes failed, and 14% stated there were major contradictions between the organization’s principles and its actual practices. The percentage of Africans that felt their South-South network operated in an egalitarian way was slightly lower (55%) than for the North-South networks: 30% thought the South-South network tried to work in an egalitarian manner but did not always succeed perfectly, and 15% that its *modus operandi* was clearly non-egalitarian. African activists are thus more inclined to point out inequalities in the workings of South-South networks. In any case, the survey results do not indicate that the African members experience South-South networks as operating in a more egalitarian fashion.

A separate study would be required to interpret these results in depth. There are, however, a few hypotheses that might explain this result. It is possible that African activists interiorize their domination, which would lead them to view the asymmetries between northern and southern militants in activist networks as normal; or they may be reluctant to criticize partnerships that provide resources (see paragraph below). It is also possible that the inequalities in South-South networks are felt more strongly than in North-South networks because the South-South networks create higher

expectations regarding equality, and/or that the organizations of the North are more concerned about euphemizing the asymmetries between participants through various devices and procedures intended for that purpose.

**Table 5.3 Perceived feeling of equality in transnational network operation by the members, according to geographical origin**

	<b>The network operates in an egalitarian manner</b> %	<b>The network tries, not always successfully, to operate in an egalitarian way</b> %	<b>There are strong contradictions between the principles of equality and the actual operation of the network</b> %
<b>Perception of a North-South network</b>			
Activists of the North	47	46	7
Activists of the South	57	30	13
- African activists	60	26	14
<b>Perception of a South-South network</b>			
- African activists*	55	30	15

\*We would note the low number of respondents in these categories and/or the high rates of no reply. Consequently, these results should be interpreted with caution.

Source: WSF Survey, Paris1-UCAD-UGB, 2011.

South-South partnerships do have a specific feature, however. Indeed, the possibilities open to African activists through participation in a North-South or South-South network are not identical: in this case, membership in a North-South network appears to offer greater professional and financial opportunities (training, travel and meetings, funding). Thus, South-South cooperation between social movements may in fact be different and more balanced for the participants – because it is less rooted in donations and the financing dimension – but at the same time paradoxically seem less attractive and advantageous to sub-Saharan African movements with few other sources of funding.

Based on the experience of the Dakar WSF, this chapter has presented a picture of the many ways in which the asymmetries within the alter-global movement are expressed according to the origins of the activists. An international division of labor between northern and southern participants is emerging in transnational activist networks and generating criticism of European organizations. This process becomes clearer (which does not mean legitimated) when we take into account the logistical issues that have prompted the actors to adopt internationalization strategies.

In our study, we have pinpointed certain specific features of South-South interaction, particularly in their legitimizing discourse, the way they present themselves, and the mechanisms of participation. Although so-called South-South partnerships claim to be more representative and better able to speak for the South, they are more selective with regard to African activists and they are seen by their African members to be egalitarian in their operations than North-South networks. Northern organizations often plan the activities to stage encounters between movements and participants of the South. In addition, hierarchies and asymmetries exist between several “Souths:” between the aid-dependent South and the “emerging” South; between Latin America and Asia, on the one hand, and Africa on the other, as well as between activists on the African continent. Thus, there does not appear to be any evidence that South-South networks operate in a more inclusive, horizontal way than North-South networks.

All these elements recall the extent to which the distinction between “North” and “South” is central to the functioning and structuring of the alter-global movement and that these categories and their operating modes are now being reconfigured. They are an invitation to pursue the analysis of this long-neglected aspect of activist movements in greater depth.

