GREAT TRANSITION INITIATIVE
TOWARD A TRANSFORMATIVE VISION AND PRAXIS

Farewell to the World Social Forum?

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The World Social Forum has been a vital gathering space for international activists. But is it losing momentum? A panel of WSF veterans **appraise its past**, **critique its present**, and **debate its future**.

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Farewell to the World Social Forum?

Roberto Savio

Looking Back

The first World Social Forum in 2001 ushered in the new century with a bold affirmation: "Another world is possible." That gathering in Porto Alegre, Brazil, stood as an alternative and a challenge to the World Economic Forum, held at the same time an ocean away in the snowy Alps of Davos, Switzerland. A venue for power elites to set the course of world development, the WEF was then, and remains now, the symbol for global finance, unchecked capitalism, and the control of politics by multinational corporations.

The WSF, by contrast, was created as an arena for the grassroots to gain a voice. The idea emerged from a 1999 visit to Paris by two Brazilian activists, Oded Grajew, who was working on corporate social responsibility, and Chico Whitaker, the executive secretary of the Commission of Justice and Peace, an initiative of the Brazilian Catholic Church. Incensed by the ubiquitous, uncritical news coverage of Davos, they met with Bernard Cassen, editor of *Le Monde Diplomatique*, who encouraged them to organize a counter-Davos in the Global South. With support from the government of Rio Grande do Sul, a committee of eight Brazilian organizations launched the first WSF. The expectation was that about 3,000 people attend (the same as Davos), but instead 20,000 activists from around the world came to Porto Alegre to organize and share their visions for six days.

WSF annual meetings enjoyed great success, invariably drawing close to 100,000 participants (even as high as 150,000 in 2005). Eventually, the meetings moved out of Latin America, first to Mumbai in 2004, where 20,000 Dalits participated, then to Caracas, Nairobi, Dakar, Tunis, and

Montreal. Along the way, two other streams—Regional Social Forums and Thematic Social Forums—were created to complement the annual central gathering, and local Forums were held in many countries. Cumulatively, the WSF has brought together millions of people willing to pay their travel and lodging costs to share their experiences and collective dreams for a better world.

The WSF's Charter of Principles, drafted by the organizing committee of the first Forum and adopted at the event itself, reflected these dreams. The Charter presents a vision of deeply interconnected civil society groups collaborating to create new alternatives to neoliberal capitalism rooted in "human rights, the practices of real democracy, participatory democracy, peaceful relations, in equality and solidarity, among people, ethnicities, genders and peoples."

Yet, the "how" of realizing any vision was hamstrung from the start. The Charter's first principle describes the WSF as an "open meeting place," which, as interpreted by the Brazilian founders, precluded it from taking stances on pressing world crises. This resistance to collective political action relegated the WSF to a self-referential place of debate, rather than a body capable of taking real action in the international arena.

It didn't have to be this way. Indeed, the 2002 European Social Forum called for mass protest against the looming US invasion of Iraq, and the subsequent 2003 Forum played a major role in organizing the day of action the following month with 15 million protesters in the streets of 800 cities on all continents—the largest demonstration in history at the time. However, the WSF's core organizers, who were not interested in this path, held sway, a phenomenon inextricable from the democratic deficit that has always dogged the Forum.

Indeed, the WSF has never had a democratically elected leadership. After the first gathering, the Brazilian host committee convened a meeting in Sao Paolo to discuss how best to carry the WSF forward. They invited numerous international organizations, and on the second day of the meeting appointed us all as the International Council. Several important organizations, not interested in this meeting, were left off the council, and those who did attend were predominately from Europe and the Americas. In the ensuing years, efforts to change the composition created as many problems as they solved. Many organizations wanted to be represented on the Council, but due to vague criteria for evaluating their representativeness

and strength, the Council soon became a long list of names (most inactive), with the roster of participants changing with every Council meeting. Despite repeated requests from participating organizations, the Brazilian founders have refused to revisit the Charter, defending it as an immutable text rather than a document of a particular historical moment.

At a Crossroads

The future of the WSF remains uncertain. Out of a misguided fear of division, the Brazilian founders have thwarted efforts to allow the WSF to issue political declarations, establish spokespeople, and reevaluate the principle of horizontality, which eschews representative decision-making structures, as the basis for governance. Perhaps most significantly, they have resisted calls to transcend the WSF's original mission as a venue for discussion and become a space for organizing. With WSF spokespeople forbidden, the media stopped coming, since they had no interlocutors. Even broad declarations that would not cause schism, like condemnation of wars or appeals for climate action, have been prohibited. As a result, the WSF has become akin to a personal growth retreat where participants come away with renewed individual strength, but without any impact on the world.

Because of its inability to adapt, and thereby act, the WSF has lost an opportunity to influence how the public understands the crises the world faces, a vacuum that has been filled by the resurgent right-wing. In 2001, globalization's critics emerged mainly on the left, pointing out how market-driven globalization runs roughshod over workers and the environment. Since then, as the WSF has floundered and social democratic parties have bought into the governing neoliberal consensus, the right has managed to capitalize on the broad and growing hostility to globalization, rooted especially in the feeling of being left behind experienced by working-class people. Prior to the US financial crisis of 2008 and the European sovereign bond crisis of 2009, the National Front in France was the only established right-wing party in the West. Since then, with a decade of economic chaos and brutal austerity, right-wing parties have blossomed everywhere.

The unsettling rise of the anti-globalization right has scrambled many political assumptions and alliances. At the start of the WSF, our enemies were the international financial institutions, such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. Now, these institutions support

reducing income inequality and increasing public investment. The World Trade Organization, the infamous target of massive protests in 1999, was our enemy as well, for skewing the rules of global trade toward multinational corporations; now, US president Donald Trump is trying to dismantle it for having any rules at all. We criticized the European Commission for its free market commitment, and lack of social action: now we have to defend the idea of a United Europe against nationalism, xenophobia, and populism. These forces have upended and transformed global political dynamics. Those fighting globalization and multilateralism, using our diagnosis, are now the right-wing forces.

Looking Ahead

Is there, then, a future for the World Social Forum? Logistically, the outlook is not good. Right-wing Brazilian president Jair Bolsonaro, an ally of authoritarian strongmen around the world, has announced that he will forbid any support for the Forum, putting its future at grave risk. Holding a forum of such size requires significant financial support, and a government at least willing to grant visas to participants from across the globe. The vibrant Brazilian civil society groups of 2001 are now struggling for survival.

Indeed, right-wing governments around the world attack global civil society as a competitor or an enemy. In Italy, Interior Minister Matteo Salvini has been pushing to eliminate the tax status of nonprofits. Like Salvini in Italy, Trump in the US, Viktor Orban in Hungary, Narendra Modi in India, and Shinzo Abe in Japan, among others, are unwilling to hear the voice of civil society. Their escalating assault on civil society might spell the formal end of the World Social Forum, although the WSF's refusal to evolve with the times left the organization vulnerable to such assaults.

If the World Social Forum does fade away as an actor on the global stage, we can take many valuable lessons from its history as we mount new initiatives for a "movement of movements." First, we need to support civil society unity. Boaventura de Sousa Santos, the Portuguese anthropologist and a leading participant in the WSF, stresses the importance of "translation" between movement streams. Women's organizations focus on patriarchy, indigenous organizations on colonial exploitation, human rights organizations on justice, and environmental organizations on sustainability. Building mutual understanding, trust, and a basis for collective work requires a process of translation and interpretation of different priorities, embedding them in a holistic framework.

Any initiative to build transnational movement coordination must address this challenge. While it is easier to build a mass action against a common enemy, nurturing a common movement culture requires a process of sustained dialogue. The WSF was instrumental in creating awareness of the need for a holistic approach to fight, under the same rubric, climate change, unchecked finance, social injustice, and ecological degradation. Building on that experience with how the issues intersect is critical to a viable global movement. The WSF has made possible alliances among the social movements, which got their legitimacy by fighting the system, and the myriad NGOs, which got theirs from the agenda of the United Nations. This is certainly a significant historical contribution, enabling the next phase in the evolution of global civil society.

Second, we need to balance movement horizontalism and organizational structure. For the vast majority of participants in cutting-edge progressive movements over the past half-century, the notion of a political party, or any such organization, has been linked to oppressive power, corruption, and lack of legitimacy. This suspicion of organization, reflected in the core ideology of the WSF, has contributed to its lack of action.

This tendency to reject verticality out of fear of its association with oppression poses a major challenge to the formation of a global movement: those who would be, in principle, its largest constituency will question overarching organizational structures. Based on historical experience, they fear the generation of unhealthy structures of power, the corruption of ideals, and the lack of real participation. Nevertheless, coordination is essential for a diverse global movement to develop sufficient coherence. The task is to find legitimate forms of collective organization that balance the tension between the commitments to both unity and pluralism.

Third, a global movement effort must navigate a new media landscape. The Internet has changed the character of political participation. Space has shrunk, and time has become fluid and compressed. Social media has become more important than conventional media. Indeed, it was essential, for example, to the election of Bolsonaro in Brazil and Salvini in Italy, as well as Brexit in the UK. US newspapers have a daily run of 62 million copies (ten million from quality papers like the *Wall Street Journal*, *New York Times*, and *Washington Post*), while Trump tweets to as many followers.

Contemporary communications technology, while used to sow confusion and abuse by the right, must be central to transnational mobilization campaigns fostering awareness and solidarity.

Political apathy among potential allies remains as great a challenge as the right-wing surge. This is not a new phenomenon. The triumphant pronouncements of the end of ideology and history three decades ago helped mute explicit debate on the long-term vision for society. Instead, the technocrats of the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, and the US Treasury foisted the Washington Consensus on the rest of the world: financial deregulation, trade liberalization, privatization, and fiscal austerity. The benefits of globalization would lift all boats; curb nonproductive social costs; privatize health and more; and globalize trade, finance, and industry. Center-left parties across the West resigned themselves to this brave new world. "Third Way" leaders like British Prime Minister Tony Blair argued that since corporate globalization was inevitable, progressives could, at best, give it a human face. In the absence of a real alternative to the dominant paradigm, the left lost its constituency. The wreckage left behind by neoliberal governments has become the engine for the populist and xenophobic forces from across the globe.

Looking ahead, to build a viable political formation for a Great Transition, we must find a banner under which people can rally. Climate action has increasingly served this function, with the youthfulness of the climate movement a reason for hope. The climate strike movement, led by Swedish student Greta Thunberg, has engaged tens of thousands of students worldwide and shown that the fight for a better world is on. These new young activists, many of whom have probably never heard of the WSF, do not pretend to come with a pre-made platform; they simply ask the system to listen to scientists. The lack of a full vision allows them to avoid many of the WSF's problems, yet still underscore how the system has exhausted its viability in the face of spiraling crises.

Millions of people across the globe are engaged at the grassroots level, hundreds of times more than related to the WSF. The great challenge is to connect with those working to change the present dire trends, making clear that we are not part of the same elite structures and, indeed, share the same enemy. The historic preconditions undergird the possibility of such a project, our visions of another world give it a direction, and the growing restlessness of countless ordinary people is a hopeful harbinger.

Can we find the modes of communication and alliance to galvanize the global movement and propel it forward? I do not see much value in a coalition of organizations and militants who meet merely to discuss among themselves. Collective action is necessary for counterbalancing the decline of democracy, increasing civic participation, and keeping values and visions at the forefront. In the WSF, the debate about moving in this direction has been going for quite some time, but has repeatedly run up against the intransigence of the founders.

It would be a mistake to lose the WSF's impressive history and convening authority. But we need to recreate it in order to reflect the present barbarized. Will we be able to reform WSF, and if this is not possible, create an alternative? Citizens have become more aware of the need for change than they were when we first met in Porto Alegre many years ago. But they are also more divided, some taking the reactionary path of following authoritarian leaders, some the progressive path of social justice, participation, transparency, and cooperation. As the conventional system destabilizes and loses legitimacy, giving life to a revamped WSF—or creating a new platform—might be easier than the challenge of launching the process eighteen years ago. Still, realizing the next phase will take new leaders, wide participation, and recognition of the need for new structures. In these times, this is a tall order.

About the Author

Roberto Savio is the founder of the Inter Press Service (IPS) news agency, a nonprofit cooperative of journalists and experts specializing in global communications and development issues. Since 1973, he has been a consultant on information and communication issues for many developing countries, designing the National Information Systems Network (ASIN) for Latin America and the Caribbean, and the UNESCO-supported Latin American Features Service (ALASEI). He has served on the International Council of the World Social Forum since its inception in 2001, and is the Chairman of the Board of the Alliance for a New Humanity. He is the co-founder of Media Watch International, co-founder of the Internet service Othernews, and president of Indoamerica, an Argentine education NGO.

Panel

Beyond the Choir

Olivier Consolo

All the various points raised by the contributors to this forum are likely right even when in contradiction with each other. That is the nature of the World Social Forum: a lively marketplace which resisted falling into the trap of a "single global campaign" approach and instead encouraged a diversity of opinions and approaches within progressive movements, allowing unexpected deliberations, partnerships, and convergences.

The past two decades of the WSF have helped shape our civil society galaxy today: diverse, sharing common values, creative in terms of strategies of influence and actions, horizontal and influential (most of the WSF's ideas and ideals are in one way or another in the mainstream debate today). The WSF has been an outstanding experience shaped by both participants and leaders, and the process as it has been proposed (open and diverse) succeeded at preventing any one sector or actor from hijacking it—a positive track record for the left. I only regret that the Anglo-Saxon world has been insufficiently active in the process, perhaps because there were assumptions on both parts that this space was run and dominated by Latin American and European organizations and leaders. From my perspective, this mistrust still reflects a leadership divide between two Western streams within civil society organizations (CSOs): Anglo-Saxon and Latin CSO worlds and traditions. The fact that the neoliberal system is broadly seen historically as an Anglo-Saxon ideology might be partly responsible for this obvious tension.

Once again, the World Social Forum is reflecting who has been leading civil society movements and organizations over the last thirty years in this framework. The WSF is, by the way, an excellent footprint of our sectors, strengths, and contradictions. For sure, future "archaeologists" will enjoy analyzing what the WSF has to say (and didn't say) about our contemporary societies.

But from my perspective, the most urgent issue is to grapple with the difficult questions for the future that the World Social Forum couldn't address yet:

- Should CSOs come together to collectively agree on strategies for breaking the glass ceiling of radical progressive people in our respective societies? In other words, should we keep putting all our scarce resources into talking and targeting the already convinced?

- In this new context, can our current radical narratives (pointing out the bad guys and assuming we are the good ones) be effective enough to engage with people who either disagree with us or don't have radical opinions on all the latest issues?

- Where can we calmly discuss the fact that intersectionality is not a strategy strong enough (alone) to guide large and diverse streams of societies towards the Great Transition?

- Can we discuss the fact that current civil society "identity" strategies have involuntarily echoed and sometimes reinforced the identity narrative of our opponents?

- Can we discuss the main societal challenges ahead which consist in overcoming current national identities and institutions (toward a shared—and not universal—sense and responsibility of/on our humanity) without feeding an anti-nationalist discourse? Actually, the current universalist discourse (either economic, philosophical, and/or humanist) has almost no resonance beyond Europe (because of its World War II history) and cosmopolitan urban elites. Opposing nations and global governance has been one of our major mistakes (showing our limited understanding of the realities and societies of the so-called Global South).

- Where are the spaces where individual leaders from social movements and CSOs (based on an ambitious and utopian prospect) can start building an alternative comprehensive political project which is multi-issue (covering the entire complexity of our societies), concrete (solutions-oriented), and serious (in terms of what can be done today with the institutions and powers we have) in order to engage with new forces within society such as universities, new citizens movements, young entrepreneurs, change agents within institutions, progressive funders, media (traditional and new), etc.? Those approaches should no longer

be systematically opposed to the long-term vision of challenging and changing power and privileges.

I do hope the next twenty years of the World Social Forum (as well as other initiatives) will contribute to opening the space for more open-minded discussions and will contribute to push us beyond our current echo chambers. The majorities (which are not the sum of minorities) are ready to follow our radical thinking on the condition that we show them that the future will be built with them too!

About the Author

Olivier Consolo was the founding Director of CONCORD (European Confederation of Development and Relief NGOs) from 2003 to 2013. He has since worked as a freelance activist to link local CSO struggles, social and political innovation, and the international agenda, with a recent focus on the Middle East. He holds a Residency at the Rockefeller Foundation Bellagio Center, and is currently collaborating with the Charles Léopold Mayer Foundation on a francophone network promoting municipalism.

Transforming the WSF

Rita Freire

With deep respect for the people who took the first steps towards Porto Alegre in 2001, with their keen perception of social unrest and the possibility of an event capable of influencing the international political scene, we must remember that the WSF was born mainly of its time. The WSF emerged from a process that exploded in 1999 in Seattle, which broke the silence of a world dominated by the Washington Consensus. A succession of uprisings took place around gatherings of the global political and economic elite—in the case of Seattle, the World Trade Organization (WTO).

The WSF comprehensively brought together the new alter-globalization movements with older activists engaged in long-term, grassroots social struggles and the NGOs and intellectuals critical of the neoliberal system. It was the great counterpoint to the powerful World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland

The WSF Charter of Principles provided a beautiful point of departure that celebrated a space open to diversity, a vigorous event located in time and space that could reproduce by virtue of its transformative force. The Charter was designed to protect the Forum from misappropriation and misrepresentation and, in a way, has preserved the original intent. But the Forum was also established to advocate for the transformation of the world, and it, too, cannot be exempt from transformation.

Media and technology have changed since the launch of the WSF. This new reality needs to be taken seriously when discussing the future. Facilitating communication between movements, struggles, and ideas has been a must for the Forum from the start. It was built by making the best use of the young Internet to disseminate its call and facilitate the emergence of regional

and local social forums. But in the ensuing decades, it has lacked resources and strategies for addressing political struggles that have moved to the digital plane. Many battles are being lost there.

In the past year, the technology community has been designing a communication network appropriate for the WSF process and debates. This has become a top agenda item for the International Council as it addresses the future. Creating and adopting the needed technology will not come without political choices. Prioritizing this modernization as part of a wider strategy would mean a resumption of communication as a priority for the WSF process for a new age.

Another challenge is to resolve the sometimes paralyzing debates surrounding the Charter of Principles. The situation in Brazil in August 2016, where a coup to overthrow President Dilma Rousseff and dismantle the nascent Brazilian rule of law was "legalized" by political institutions and naturalized by the media, was one of the most tense and emblematic cases of a long discussion about the political impact of the WSF and its Charter. The call for a strong and unified declaration was denied—under strong protest—by the International Council. That led to a document signed by a collection of individuals that lost relevance, since individually, each board member represented only their own organization, not the collectivity that the WSF could have represented.

We can't know how much difference a public statement by the WSF in 2016 would have made to the mood of the confrontations in Brazil. But it is also true that the consequences of the coup were devastating. It led to unthinkable setbacks and the election of a candidate aligned with humanity's worst political vices: the celebration of arms, torture, military and religious control over the government, environmental destruction, and discrimination. It allowed a government that fully submits to US interests in current geopolitical conflicts, as well as to Israel's, thus steering the world toward darker fate. All of this came without a strong and resounding warning from the WSF against the coming disaster.

But the main limit to the political impact of the WSF may not come from the paragraphs of its Charter, but from the way the debate on the document competes with other possible

foci of attention. How do we connect the energy arising from encounters with real collective possibilities for collective action? This challenge falls to the International Council, as facilitators of the WSF process—a political task that needs to be addressed by those with the legitimacy and commitment to undertake it. Adopting democratic processes, as Savio's article suggests, would be a leap in that direction.

Changing the process means that today's Board should deal with transforming itself to transform its dynamics. That sounds painful to the current Council, yet it goes back to the symbolism of the ouroboros that bites its own tail, thus feeding on the experience, digesting mistakes, renewing and evolving itself.

The Charter of Principles was born from the WSF and not the other way around. If the WSF's dynamics are legitimized by the processes, there are no prohibited transformations.

About the Author

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Farewell to What? Redefining the Process

Pierre George

Those ready to sound the death knell for the WSF have not expressed clearly what the WSF is to which they are saying farewell. At the same time, those of us seeking to further develop the WSF as a process must be clearer about communicating what the WSF is meant to be and what are our collective ways forward as WSF process participants and as WSF process facilitators.

Throughout the twenty years since the WSF was first launched in Porto Alegre, neoliberal hegemony has persisted, and the political forces maintaining this hegemony have added darker values to the sad passions of competition, greed, envy, and consumerism. The WSF process has been visible through significant events but has not grown to counter-hegemonic scale, nor to a steady "counter-Davos" format.

There have been proposals for bringing together transformative forces, such as Peoples Global Action (founded in 1996), the International Peoples Assembly (founded in 2019), and several other efforts aimed at fostering collaboration between climate justice and post-development activists. However, there is no decentralized, horizontal, and scalable multi-thematic counter-hegemonic "process" proposal comparable to the WSF in sight (the emphasis on "process" as opposed to "movement" here is key).

The WSF, innovative in its format as a facilitated open space, remains a valid proposition for massive horizontal self-organizing. It is based on voluntary "dialogic activities" between autonomous participant civil society organizations, focused on popular education and transformative initiatives (struggles, campaigns, projects), held in a shared open space, without overarching vertical representation or leadership on political contents therein produced. The innovation lies in the radical horizontalism of a process that be sustained by its participants,

relying on a decolonized Enlightenment culture, valuing dialogue and reason, and empowering its participants. In this process, facilitators are taking responsibility for participation formats, but are not claiming for leadership on political contents

Looking Back

There has been insufficient attention given to developing and formalizing WSF open space process methodology, rooted in shared knowledge through practice and specific vocabulary. For many involved with the WSF, the idea of a "WSF event" has been clearer than that of a "WSF process," which has remained much fuzzier. Indeed, a more formal consideration of the WSF process is a necessary step for this process to reach a counter-hegemonic status. The other step is being able to communicate the process to many more people—for example, via the Internet.

The WSF idea had a strong start, backed by significant funding. However, the demise of many early social forum process-events, at regional, thematic, and local scale, has been due, in large part, to the fact that many of their "facilitators" did not understand, or want to understand, the practical implications of facilitating a horizontal, open, dialogic space format as laid out in the WSF charter. This diagnosis should have spurred methodological efforts.

Instead, collective reflection on methodology has been more wanting since 2011, when the International Council, the nearest thing to a WSF facilitating community, stopped its methodology commission, which had mostly focused on WSF event methodology, and not ventured much into exploring notions about the process-event and less so those about the overall WSF process. Cold exchange of papers replaced the heated and stimulating face-to-face or online discussions, with the younger generation virtually absent from the debate.

That the WSF is still going after nearly twenty years is a testament to its relevance, but the transmission of its ownership from the founding generation, who came of age in 1960s and 1970s activism, to the next generations is not secure. With the WSF process now less trendy, individuals and organizations committed to promoting it must rely primarily on their own resources, which requires a higher level of motivation.

Participant experience in a WSF event, built along methodology developed before 2010, can also feel somewhat stale today, a consequence of the weak collective methodological efforts developed in the last decade. Those efforts have not allowed for new participation formats meant to stimulate and make mutually visible, hence "articulable," concrete autonomous initiatives with actions, announced by specific coalitions of WSF participants, or for development of collective practices of online participation for those who are unable to come to an event, whether for reasons of time, visa, or money.

Neglect of formalization and methodology is definitely one reason to account for the wide gap between the WSF's original counter-hegemonic potential, as a "formal massive organizing innovation," and its current reality, which is still significant. To reduce this gap, persistent facilitating work from a refreshed WSF facilitating community is necessary.

At the Crossroads

WSF process facilitators are permanently at a crossroads. They have the options to quit or continue as facilitators. They have the options to involve or not other contributors from their organizations to build the capacity of a WSF facilitating community. They have the options to resist or not calls or temptations to "overlay a voice onto the open space," whether through acting as a spokesgroup, setting a political agenda for the Forum, instituting a super-assembly speaking with an implicit forum-wide voice, or other means.

In part because of the erratic dynamics of the International Council, created too quickly in 2001 after the success of the first WSF event, there is still not an effective WSF facilitating community, one willing to guide the development of the WSF process as intended by its initiators. Indeed, the Council has served more as a gathering of personal representatives of politically significant WSF participant entities. Contributing somehow to the overall WSF process facilitation, itself not well-defined, was not a requisite to be part of this council. The absence of an effective WSF process facilitating community has hindered the collective work of exchanging experience and exploring more participation formats in the various manifestations of the general WSF process.

Some may brand the present proposal to resume formalizing and developing WSF methodology

methodology as uselessly "formalistic," or as an attempt to "depoliticize the forum." "Methodology should be at the service of politics," they may argue. But what does "politicizing the forum" mean, and how is this done? And by whom? The facilitators?

The WSF format, as an innovation in massive social self-organizing, is designed to empower participating civil society organizations, and the coalitions they build, as the relevant political actors in the open space. It is meant as a dialogic process, welcoming to movements, and not as a movement itself. The WSF is not intended to be a political subject itself, even though such a vision is seductive for some facilitators and comfortable for some participants.

A massive horizontal decentralized process cannot be sustained by a vertical leadership, but by participants sharing and owning a common view of this process, with clear concepts and vocabulary. Developing a living "WSF lexicon" could be a priority for the methodology work of a WSF facilitating community.

Looking Ahead

An "intra-WSF facilitating community compact" could be a way forward for working together despite differences about directions for the facilitation of WSF process. A first possible step would be to explore the problematic implications of a "splitting scenario": retaining the current WSF open space process, while establishing a WSF-related movement.

Then, a "cohesive scenario" could be explored for cooperation between (1) those focusing on improving the relevancy, clarity, and quality of participation formats in WSF process, and (2) those focusing on stimulating the building of "coalitions from below," using those participation formats, to develop, in a decentralized way, through formulation and articulation of initiatives, the political contents in the forum space, and thus the resulting overall political significance of the WSF process.

If the proposal for such an "intra-WSF facilitating community compact" were well received among facilitators, some could proceed with creating spaces for discussion about facilitating experience and methodology. A permanent methodology working group could be re-established, along with a second group to cultivate a "WSF calendar of events," giving a concrete vision about the overall process.

We can deplore the lost years, energies, and opportunities in WSF facilitation, and, as we look ahead, we know there is no way to catch up miraculously on those. We cannot expect fast results or trust fast-track solutions. However, in troubled times, we need to be ready to greet the challenges ahead in an updated WSF open space.

One critically strategic task is inspiring younger generations to come and use the WSF process tool and space. A participant-to-participant outreach campaign using social networks on affinity basis in the build-up to the forthcoming WSF Mexico could reach out to many young people. It would invite them to join "welcoming groups" ushering them in a diversity of thematic intercommunication spaces, inviting to express their goals in the forum and informing about how to participate. Rooted in the harsh and swiftly evolving reality of twenty-first century, younger participants could then feel empowered in the WSF process, dialoguing with the legacies of elderly activists, and using this WSF tool for their own coalition building political goals.

So, rather than saying "farewell to the WSF," let us issue an invitation to "get back to work" and implement what can be realistically prepared and achieved, leaving "what it could have been if…" laments for the end of the facilitating day, in a refreshed WSF facilitating community.[1]

1. Elements for renewed efforts of formalization about WSF process advocated in this text are presented in the following document: http://openfsm.net/projects/gti-and-wsf/gtiandwsf-input7-formal-view-wsf and in other spaces of www.openfsm.net.

About the Author

Pierre George has helped facilitate various World Social Forum events since 2003, including regional and thematic forums. He represents Caritas Internationalis, an international NGO network, on the WSF's International Council. In the context of WSF International Council Communication Commission, he administers a website (www.openfsm.net), an online space for participation in and facilitation of the WSF process.

An Agenda Beyond the WSF

Candido Grzybowski

I have been involved in the World Social Forum process since 2000, when representatives of eight Brazilian social organizations and movements—later called the Organizing Committee—met to launch the first forum in Porto Alegre the next year. My relation to the WSF has had two phases: first, deep engagement from 2000 to 2010 and, second, a critical position with gradual withdrawal after that. I draw from this experience in this contribution to the timely debate that Roberto Savio provokes.

The WSF was conceived as an open space that would be a battery recharger of active citizenship, now necessarily of planetary dimension because of the need to resolve the contradictions of capitalism at a global scale. The WSF has undoubtedly made a fundamental contribution to the emergence of a worldwide citizen culture, and continues today propelled by civil society organizations, social movements, and networks around the world. In its early years, it helped build collective political intelligence about the problems, challenges, and possibilities of the struggles we waged, each in our own way across the planet. It underscored our interdependence as we share the same world and the same challenge to remake it. For our great diversity of identities and cultures, our plurality of views and perspectives, the WSF offered us an open space—a kind of factory for a new political culture—for us to recognize ourselves as part of a shared humanity and a shared planetary system.

The world's cultural, political, and economic context has changed greatly since 2001. The multiple recent crises are expressions of the contradictions and limits to which globalized capitalism submits humanity and the sustainability of life on the planet. "Another possible world" remains an urgent need. However, as I have argued in the past, we need to think beyond the

WSF, while still allowing it to continue the inspiring task for which it was founded. WSF meetings nourished dreams and hopes for many around the world and should continue to do so with the younger generations of today.

The WSF as Inspiration and as Limit

The most obvious contribution of the WSF was as a galvanizing force that opposed Davos and asserted that "another world is possible." It did this by appealing to the capacity for transformative action of the multiple and diverse collective subjects, organized into resisting organizations, movements, networks, coalitions, and alliances to formulate concrete proposals and fight for their realization. The WSF created the foundations of a new political culture of transformation precisely by establishing horizontal planetary dialogue as an imperative, without antagonism, racism, or patriarchalism—dialogue within and between collective subjects, each recognizing each other as equals. Due to its open space for diversity and plurality—as defined in the Charter of Principles—the WSF has become a reference point for meetings and exchanges, without hierarchies or priorities.

However, we all brought our mental structures, values, and practices, with all their contradictions, starting with the simplest: we confuse diversity with each one doing what they wanted, making difficult the collaboration and synthesis that is the raison d'être of the WSF space. In fact, we were deluded about the size of the task ahead with our way of thinking and acting freighted by conceptual and political tendencies that undermined unity. Not least, despite the massive presence of feminist organizations and movements, tenacious machismo did not give women proper relevance in dialogues and exchanges. Also, while language and cultural diversity are heritages to preserve, we could not cope with the problem of translation, despite the information and communication technologies available to us.

Despite these problems, a great legacy of the WSF was the rescue and appreciation of politics as the quintessential arena for building another world, and citizen action as the necessary transformational force. In a capitalist world increasingly dominated by bigness, privatization, commodification, cynicism, and violence, the WSF highlighted core ethical principles and values for thinking about nature, life, the economy, and power.

The WSF's strengths lay in rekindling hope and renewing human agency, questioning the determinist assumptions and antagonisms typical of leftist culture, and valuing the diversity of collective subjects. However, the WSF had its limits: most clearly, its emphasis solely on building consciousness and will for action, rather than action itself. For transformative forces to emerge, we need to take a path beyond the WSF to new forms of collective action.

Elements for an Agenda Beyond the WSF

Repoliticizing the relationship between the biosphere, power, culture, and the economy and acting from a planetary and cosmopolitan perspective is the starting point. The WSF has given centrality to politics and power, downplaying market relations and the economy. In this way, it pointed to the power of active citizenship, but did not elaborate and define the agenda or agendas for struggle. Rather, the agendas of each individual movement, network, coalition, and alliance were debated and often updated at WSF events, but the responsibility for carrying them out rested with the one who adopted them without formal support from all Forum participants. It is the duty of Forum participants to carry the political agenda forward before and after events. The "beyond the WSF" I refer to embodies this sense of ongoing intervention, taking inspiration from the WSF only as a moment of reflection and exchange.

Today, I think that the central issue for confronting capitalism is the search for alternatives to the "crisis of civilization" rooted in colonial, racist, patriarchal, Eurocentric, and imperialist rule over peoples and nature, and in industrial growth, productivism, and consumerism. Environmental destruction and social injustice are intrinsic conditions of capitalism, exacerbated today by globalization at the service of the great economic and financial conglomerates under the imperialist militarized guard. The fracturing of the social fabric and the eroding of the resilience of the biosphere, the common basis for life itself, is becoming irreversible. To make all life sustainable, it is essential to tackle injustice on both its social and environmental sides: eco-social injustice. It is no longer possible to limit our call to changing social relations of production, heretofore the dominant ideal of the left. The ideal of industrial society—its productivism and limitless accumulation, the goods and services it provides, and the style of consumption and life it generates—is part of the eco-social injustice that we must confront. The idea of resistance to the commodification of everything was always well-represented in the WSF. But this is

only part of the story. The whole vision of human civilization and its relationship to nature needs to be reimagined, from local to global, reflecting the possibilities and limits of the biosphere and the cultural, scientific, and technical creativity of each people, in a spirit of interdependence and planetary solidarity, resilience, and sustainability.

Accordingly, a key element of the new political culture and social transformation agenda is to decolonize and liberate our ways of thinking and acting. In the context of the "crisis of civilization," we need to advance a deep shift in power and economic institutions. What condemns many to poverty, exclusion, and multiple forms of inequality and domination is not a lack of development, but development itself. Development constantly reinvents racism, patriarchy, xenophobia, and intolerance to dominate and exclude. Today, it is visible in the territorialization of racism, the fissures between city and countryside and between agribusiness and social forms of production, and the relations between peoples and nations. Patriarchy is renewed and naturalized by capitalism, which devalues, but benefits from, an economy of care, imposing a double workday on women.

In the struggle for "another possible world," or, as I prefer to say, "another possible civilization," we are faced with the unavoidable need to oppose citizenship and peoples' sovereignty to national states and their monopoly in the world sphere of power. This implies taking on the existing legal framework that denies equal rights and destroys the natural foundations of life. This is fundamental: citizenship is not a gift of states, but a political condition of being part of humanity. Therefore, the agenda of rethinking and refounding the state necessarily arises as a political expression of the power that equal and diverse "citizenships" confer on it.

Interdependence between peoples and nations in today's globalized capitalism is undoubtedly a major problem created by the imperialist domination of developed countries, particularly the United States. But this interdependence carries a contradiction that offers a huge possibility for the future. The WSF itself, as a space for an emerging planetary citizenship, would not have been possible were it not for the diffuse awareness that we are part of the same humanity and share the same planet. Interdependence, however, cannot be theorized and practiced without a concrete location, where we have the essentials of our lives and relationships with others and make our exchanges with the biosphere. Burning questions arise. How can we rethink this place, in terms of power, culture, and

economy, from a planetary citizen perspective? And how can we rethink world power from a perspective of territorialized citizenship?

A Possible Way of Acting Beyond the WSF

The fundamental need is to reorganize our forces in order to propel the agenda of building another civilization. The WSF serves as an inspiration, but it lacks the capacity to undertake the difficult and continuing task of collective organizing, assessing political opportunities, and waging the struggle. The process of action begins by agreeing on a broad agenda. This already points beyond the WSF to the plurality of citizens as a possible historical block for constituting and instituting planetary citizenship of another world. The tricky question is how to build coalitions with a maximum common denominator (to counteract the lowest common denominator of certain generic and empty statements) for forging the agenda and as a basis for political action. This requires inter-movement coalitions and active organizations of citizens. The relative success of existing thematic campaigns and networks for strategic thinking, such as the Great Transition Network, is a point of departure. However, we need differentiated and coordinated actions of a militant citizen movement contesting existing structures and powers in the most diverse situations. For this, intra-movement networks and organizations are needed for linking local and world-embracing strategic visions. This requires the patient work of building new collective political agencies, necessarily plural and diverse, with their own identities and proposals, from local to global, understanding their potential power to transform the world.

The crucial challenge is the construction of counter-hegemonies in concrete local societies and at various levels of political influence, up to world power structures. How can we do this without factionalism, as is the tradition of the left? The answer lies in building open coalitions, which starts by recognizing others as indispensable, and depends on honoring and implementing their agenda. In this way, active consensus can be generated, which is fundamental in the struggle for a new hegemony. For this, public space for debate and free circulation of ideas will remain essential.

About the Author

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The New Phase of Alter-Globalization

Gustave Massiah

Looking Back

The alter-globalization movement is a historical emancipation movement that, while opposed to conventional market-driven globalization, supports global cooperation for justice, peace, and ecology. As such, the movement extends and renews historical movements fighting for workers' rights, peasants' rights, women's rights, and decolonization. It arose in the late 1970s as the anti-systemic movement of contemporary global capitalism. Since then, it has gone through several phases. Initially, it focused on resisting the imposition of structural adjustment plans and addressing the debt crisis. Then, action centered on challenging the array of international institutions buttressing the capitalist system, with global mobilizations against the G7 and G20, the IMF, the World Bank, and the WTO. A third phase began in 2000 with the launch of the World Social Forum.

Over these decades, alter-globalization confronted the evolution of international affairs and capitalist globalization. The 2008 financial crisis revealed the exhaustion of neoliberalism and the fragility of financial capitalism. Ecological awareness, particularly with regard to climate change, unmasked the limits of capitalism and productivism. Post-crisis policies, such as austerity plans, have exacerbated inequalities and fostered distrust of politicians. Starting in 2011, insurgencies broke out in dozens of countries as millions of people occupied the streets and public squares. The same watchwords were present everywhere: the rejection of poverty, inequality, discrimination, and repression, and the demand to reinvent democracy and take bold action to address the ecological crisis. Everywhere, new challenges arise, such as combating corruption and rejecting the political influence of the financial classes. Although these movements were not in contradiction with the World Social Forum, they did not identify with it.

The years after 2013 have seen the emergence of counterrevolutions rooted in racist, xenophobic, and security-based ideologies, and a wave of decentralized wars. Neoliberalism is hardening its domination and reliance on repression, with coups d'état elevating reactionary governments into power in several countries. These developments have put social and citizen movements in a defensive posture. The situation requires a new wave of social, democratic, political, ideological, and cultural resistance.

At a Crossroads

Several conservative counterrevolutions are simultaneously under way: the neoliberal counterrevolution, the counterrevolution of dictatorships, and the counterrevolutions of evangelical, Islamist, and Hindu conservatisms. These regressive developments are a reminder that revolutionary periods, which are generally brief, are often followed by violent and much longer counterrevolutions. But counterrevolutions do not negate revolutions, as the emergent new world continues to progress, resurfacing in new forms, sometimes after a long delay.

The hardening of contradictions and social tensions explains the proliferation of extreme forms of confrontation. As neoliberalism loses its alliance with the middle classes and certain popular strata, it turns its back on a relatively democratic option, instead, turning toward authoritarianism and state-sponsored violence. At the same time, the rise of relative impoverishment and insecurity may explain the appeal of nationalist and extremist discourses. But the anguish and uncertainty about a new world order offers a more deeply rooted reason. Although reaction takes different forms, this is the underlying basis for Trump in the United States, Bolsonaro in Brazil, Orbán in Hungary, Modi in India, and Duterte in the Philippines.

There are five unfinished revolutions under way. The revolution in women's rights is challenging thousands of years of patriarchal domination. The revolution in the rights of peoples, the second phase of decolonization after the independence of Third World nations, highlights the liberation of peoples and the form of the nation-state. The revolution in ecological awareness brings the idea of finiteness in space and time, and humanity's place in the natural world. The technological revolution is having far-reaching impacts: the revolution in digital technology is transforming language and writing, and that in biotechnology is

extending the limits of the human body. The revolution in demographics is underway toward a larger, older, and more mobile population, with migration one manifestation.

There is no guarantee that these unfinished and uncertain revolutions will not be quelled, diverted, or co-opted, but there is no evidence to support such outcomes either. Upheavals are changing the world and bringing hope for the future, but also causing great suppression and violence.

The World Social Forum has had a role in addressing these new challenges, but has not been able to bring together a strategic response. The Belém Social Forum in 2009 articulated the contrast between resistance (e.g., to financialization and austerity), on the one hand, and advancing an ecological, social, and democratic transition, on the other. Still, the translation of this affirmative vision into a concrete political agenda remains to be seen.

Looking Ahead

The World Social Forum remains a meeting place for movements under the alter-globalization umbrella. It is no longer the central place for the project of advancing an alternative society but does participate in it. Even as many movements have withdrawn into national spaces, new movements have emerged to lead the debate on how to play offense, rather than just defense. For this task, World Social Forums are necessary but deeply insufficient. For the moment, they offer spaces for movements to develop the international dimensions of their strategies, and to make adjustments going forward. Alter-globalization, born from the convergence of social and citizen movements and of the international networks of movements, now needs to invent a new phase.

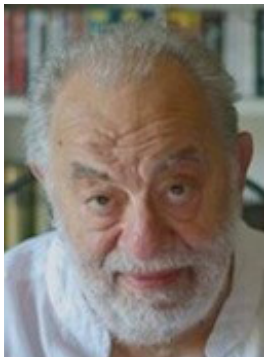
In this process of reinvention, the alter-globalization movement must reaffirm its respect for the diversity of movements—this is what intersectionality across classes, genders, origins, and more means. Also, we need to be concerned about the "NGO-ization" of movements as distinct from mobilization movements. Considerable cultural changes are at work that will shape the alter-globalization movement, in particular, the new forms of engagement of younger generations.

The alter-globalization movement reminds us that the transformation of each society depends on changing the world. In particular, the movement is based on international law built around respect for fundamental rights. Instead of a form of development based on productivist growth and forms of domination, it fosters a strategy for an ecological, social, democratic, and geopolitical transition.

Thus, we need a strategy that integrates action at all levels from local to global. The local level implies a link between territories and local democratic institutions. The national level involves redefining politics, representation, and delegation of power in a democratic society, as well as the strengthening of public authorities (state institutions, regions, municipalities, etc.) and democratic control of state power. Major regions are the spaces for environmental, geocultural, and multipolarity policies. The global level addresses the ecological emergency, international institutions, international law not subordinated to business law, freedom of movement, and migrants' rights.

Going forward, all movements and international networks of movements must redefine their strategies in light of the changes and disruptions characterizing the world today, and to highlight the international dimension of these strategies. This approach can usher in the new phase of alter-globalization.

About the Author



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The WSF: A Wasted Opportunity?

Meena Menon

Are we debating the role of the World Social Forum, eighteen years after its inception, only as a thing of the past or as an actionable part of the future? If the former, it would be a question of gathering lessons to inform other processes. If we are thinking of it as a process which still has relevance in the present context, then it becomes more immediate, even urgent. Has the context in which the Forum was founded, changed so much that it is no longer relevant? Even if it has not, is it too late to revive the Forum given its current state?

To answer this, we may need to look back at the factors leading to the Forum's successes in the first place. With protests against globalization, especially free trade, sweeping the globe, social movements, big and small, saw the opportunity, possibility, and usefulness of international solidarity. Globalization meant not just rapidly expanding corporate markets and profiteering but also greater access to news and information, and travel across borders was easier than ever before. Hence, the audacious global call to the world community to challenge the philosophy of corporate globalization as symbolized by the World Economic Forum received an enthusiastic response from social movements and all kinds of progressive groups and intellectuals, at first mainly from Latin America and Europe, and later from all over the world. Bolstered by this, the Forum grew, and it traveled from its home in Brazil to India, Venezuela, Kenya, Senegal, Tunisia, and even Canada. All the events were successful to lesser and greater degrees, although the Forum started to slowly lose its glitter and has now almost reached a dead end. Some of the main factors for the popularity of the Forum were:

1. The successes of anti-globalization mobilizations and the felt need for global solidarity by social movements.

2. The support of left parties in Brazil and, subsequently, of other left parties, including those with strong electoral presence and those in government.

3. The excitement of building what seemed like a global movement for an alternative politics, based on various approaches to socialism and radical democracy.

4. The access to funding from various anti-globalization organizations.

5. The popular rise of national consciousness against rapacious global corporate greed.

6. The strength of the process of working together across differences with the common aim of opposing corporate globalization and "building another world."

7. The possibility of creating one's own spaces within a larger shared space without the pressure to agree or the need for consensus.

The Forum soon faced the challenges of growth, which exposed the weaknesses inherent in its foundation:

1. The WSF International Council, which consisted of the organizations that were part of the first and second forum, had been created in an ad hoc manner. More organizations wanted to join, and it became impossible to decide on how to expand the IC. Hierarchy was anathema to social movements, and political parties tended to be bureaucratic. A judicious combination of structure, on one hand, and consensus-based decision-making and core teams working with broad, open working groups at all levels, on the other, might have been the answer, but this did not happen—or when they were attempted, they did not function.

2. The diversity of the organizations involved, especially as more countries participated, created a situation where a few organizations were seen as controlling the process. In the absence of any alternative methodology, these conflicts became more intense. The popularity and the spontaneity of the various forums became a weakness rather than the strength that it should have been.

3. The social forum process fell victim to the intrinsic sectarianism within the left political spectrum. An open space was a difficult concept for most of the left and liberal intelligentsia

and organizations led by the intelligentsia. Intense debates, jockeying for space within the open space without a healthy respect for the common space, corroded the spirit of the Forum.

4. There were deep divisions regarding the role of the Forum. On one hand, some felt that the Forum should become a network, issuing calls for action and developing consensus, even based on the majority, if consensus was not possible. Others, especially from more diverse countries like India, felt that this would break the Forum because consensus was impossible on any issue in these countries.

5. Funding for the Forum began to dry up as the cracks within the International Council started to affect its functioning. The reluctance of the core organizations to let governments led by sympathetic political parties support (and therefore maybe overly influence) the Forum was another unresolved issue. The WSF office could not function without funds, and the importance of a proper center was not appreciated by many social movements. Voluntarism could only go so far.

6. Those who started the Forum and the forum process, in Brazil and in the various countries where the Forum was organized, were seen by other newer entrants as controlling the space. This charge was often true, with some people trying to "represent" the Forum and setting themselves up as leaders, as arbiters of inclusion and exclusion in the process. These differences became more and more bitter and unfriendly, seen as contrary to the spirit of the Forum.

Meanwhile, the political situation has evolved. The priority was no longer the battle against globalization, but the rise of the right wing and the weakening of support for the left and for a progressive agenda. The left failed to build on and clarify their perspectives on globalization, to differentiate a progressive agenda from that of the anti-globalization right. They were more accustomed to fight for control than to celebrate diversity. The reasons for the rise of the right wing are not very different from the reasons for the fading out of the Forum, however. The failures in the theory and practice of the progressive movements, political parties, and NGOs were directly responsible for their loss of popularity, and the rise of the right.

The tradition of fighting for and taking political ideological positions always seemed to outweigh the urgent need to address rising right-wing politics, pulling together across the huge diversity

of interests represented in the Forum despite differences, and building better alliances across social movements and left and liberal political parties. Social movements were more comfortable with fighting centrist and left political parties and less prepared to fight the populist politics of the right wing. This led to the political crisis that helped the right wing to come to power on the same anti-globalization issues popularized by the Forum and the movements that created it. The agenda that mobilized participation in the various forums was changing, but the Forum was not reflecting this. Instead of working with the International Council and the various organizing committees in the various regions and countries, those who differed failed to see the political urgency of closing ranks against the rising tide of right-wing populism. The experiment of working together despite differences, which should have been one of the main contributions of the social forum process, failed to overcome the traditional suspicions between the actors in the forum space: social movements, political formations, and intellectuals. Sectarianism was fashionable; self-reflection, uncommon.

Would the Forum have become more relevant if it had taken positions on world issues? This is speculative. The earlier calls from the Forum were not signed by all the participants in the Forum; they were calls from different thematic axes within the Forum. The positions that the Forum did take did not make many political waves. The thematic forums, which focused on specific topics and issued statements, were not as effective as the bigger, more open events. If the IC had presumed to issue calls for action or even issued political statements, it would have been accused of trying to represent the thousands of organizations that attended the various Social Forum events, without consulting them. This would have been the case even if the calls had been in the spirit of the WSF Charter. The International Council did not enjoy that kind of credibility. Their role was to enable, not to lead. So the call would have to come from within the Forum events. But there were far too many participants to be able to claim consensus on a statement. The solution was the creation of strategy spaces which did issue statements, such as the Social Movements Assemblies, and these statements were important mobilizing tools. The differences on the role of the Forum led to deep divisions and extreme positions.

The proponents of the open space concept included those who advocated that the inauguration and the opening plenaries of the Forum should not be organized, because the sessions might be seen as positions taken by the entire Forum. This was a puzzling stance. There were also some

who felt that only social movements should have space to speak in the main plenaries, not "stars." Unfortunately, the result was that many did not attend at all. A lot of the excitement around the Forum was for attendees to hear people whom they had read and heard a lot about.

Maybe the more effective methodology to keep the Forum going would have been to open it up further, to take the help of political parties in government to organize the Forum, to have more commitment to diversity and political differences. The reluctance of the IC toward holding forums in Europe and in OECD countries should have been overcome early. Maybe the IC should have become an open forum, with a small core and an office in Brazil.

There are those who say that the very popularity of the Forum led to its downfall. That the very number of participants was so staggering that it became difficult to organize. This is ironic—that too many was the problem, not too few!

Although people came to the Forum and participated on their own, affordable space was required to stay for seminars, events, and cultural programs. For most smaller organizations, organizing a Forum would be impossible unless they (a) built very broad alliances with all kinds of organizations in the city or (b) linked up with local government and political parties. For India, the Social Forum represented a process that lasted for over two years, building unlikely friendships and alliances which had a deep impact on the politics of protest movements in the country, and could have done more if it had not fallen apart due to bickering and sectarianism.

Is the Forum still relevant? In its present form, perhaps not. The work of popularizing the Forum, which took a decade, has been jettisoned. But clearly, the need for a political pole counter to the right wing globally, where there is a space to come together for debate, sharing, and solidarity, has never been as important as today. And one can only hope that it is not political cynicism that is preventing this from happening.

Therefore, in a sense, yes, the potential of reviving the Forum does exist, but many changes and much open discussion would be needed. A reinvigorated Forum would also need to include not only social movements and NGOs, but also all left and progressive parties fighting for another world.

About the Author

Meena Menon is a senior consultant on urban policy at Action Aid India, where she has created an urban policy group, a network for labor organizations working with informal labor, and the Urban Action School for policy practitioners. Previously, she was an organizer for a left party in India, a trade union organizer in the textile sector, the India coordinator for Focus on the Global South, and a consultant at the United Nations Development Program. She serves on the International Council of the World Social Forum and was actively involved with the Forum in India. She is the co-author of the acclaimed *One Hundred Years, One Hundred Voices: The Mill Workers of Girangaon: An Oral History*.

No Political Voice, No Future

Francine Mestrum

So much has been said already about the World Social Forum, its past and its future, its successes and its failures. There is certainly no consensus about any of these. There is a past with many successes and some major failures. Whether there is a future will depend on what our objectives are.

The world has changed since 2001, the year the WSF premiered. Looking back, while thinking of a possible future, I wonder if our major mistake has been that we have never clarified what exactly we wanted. "Another world is possible"—certainly, it still is, but for whom and from what perspective? It was an excellent slogan, but it allowed us to never say how "other," how different, and in what way, that new world would be.

As Roberto Savio says, the direct impetus for the WSF was an outcry against neoliberalism, structural adjustment, the austerity policies of the international organizations, and the financialization of the economy. There was still some hope that, ten years after the end of the Cold War, there was a possibility for peace, for better international relations, for global governance, for progress and development.

In the early Forums, according to my research, the demands for real system change were, in fact, rare.[1] There was very little talk of anti-capitalism, socialism, or revolutionary strategies. The radical alternatives discussed focused on social relations, participation, and a solidarity economy beyond markets. There was very little anti-globalization, but more alter-globalization with demands for a fair global order, based on the United Nations as opposed to the World Trade Organization, the World Bank, and the International Monetary Fund. There was a strong belief and trust in democratic values of participation and citizenship. In sum, the first World Social

Forums were mainly reformist, succeeding in delegitimating the existing neoliberal system but without achieving convergence of demands and strategies.

A Market for Alternatives

Today, none of the problems have disappeared, though the priorities and demands of social movements are different. There has been a shift towards more local topics and more post-development topics, which converge in a defense of nature and indigenous people, and an opposition to modernity and large infrastructure projects. NGOs continue to talk about issues that are already on the agenda of international organizations, such as the Sustainable Development Goals. Topics like the environment, gender, and migration, have also gained momentum.

Climate change rightly became priority number one, and while it is often said that climate justice and social justice go hand in hand, this link is never made concrete. The resurgence of fascism worldwide is barely mentioned. But at the last Forum in Salvador de Bahia, there were workshops on hip-hop and "women and soccer." Approximately thirty proposals have been made for "thematic axes" for the upcoming Forum in Mexico next fall. When the apparent contradiction between the huge global problems we are facing and the lightness of the topics discussed is pointed out, the response from the founders is that we should respect the Charter of Principles. No topics are more important than others.

This lack of focus and of hierarchy are both responsible for the decline of the WSF. Its founders have been neither able nor willing to adapt to the reality of our times. Most intellectuals have left the International Council (IC), discussions are now mainly technical and self-referential, and decisions are in the hands of weak and mostly local movements and NGOs.

The WSF and its potentially important concept of "open space" have become a festival where all can come and do whatever they like. This results in a kind of market where participants offer their own alternative, at whatever level and to whomever is interested. There is no effort anymore to achieve convergence, to propose concrete and unified positions and actions. And since no one can speak in the name of the WSF or the IC, media are not interested anymore.

Two small but telling examples may clarify what this means for the political existence of the WSF and its IC. At the 2016 IC meeting of Montreal, after the "coup" against Dilma Rousseff in Brazil, a proposal was made to denounce this anti-democratic event. The founders refused, stating that a first agreement in the IC was a "coup" in itself, and that even in case of consensus, no declaration should be made. A similar attitude existed during the WSF in Salvador de Bahia, after the assassination of Marielle Franco in Rio de Janeiro. No, this was not a matter for the WSF, another founder declared; we had nothing to say on this brutal act.

It should be clear that a "market forum" without political voice has and should have no future.

The Need for a World Social Forum

Today's world is in a worse shape than it was twenty years ago. Structural adjustment, now called "austerity," is applied the world over; climate change is hitting most countries, including the rich ones; thousands of people try to migrate and are dying at sea, in the desert, or at some fence. Slavery is re-emerging. Proto-fascist and authoritarian regimes are killing democracy, violating human rights, and reducing the space for social movements. Never before has there been a bigger need for a strong global voice to delegitimate this state of affairs and to propose alternatives.

However, most movements are now turning inwards, taking the slogan "think globally, act locally" very literally. These local actions are certainly very valuable, and it is true that at the city level, with the new thinking on municipalism, concrete alternatives with a direct impact on people's lives can be very important.

However, as was already understood twenty years ago, it can never be sufficient. The choice is not between local and global; we obviously need both. We should not leave the global capitalist system untouched.

Unfortunately, the traditional political advocates of alternatives—social democracy and the radical left—remain silent. Social democracy largely was converted to neoliberalism and lost much of its legitimacy; the radical left has failed to grapple with the failures of "real socialism" and largely remains stuck with old recipes without any traction for today's youth. As for the Greens,

they have not achieved any convergence and are too often focused on the single environmental question. We must fight neoliberal capitalism if we want to preserve the environment and achieve social justice.

Can the old WSF, then, be resuscitated? Should it? The advantage is that its formula—its "brand"—exists, and that it has some beautiful principles such as horizontalism and open space. I see four conditions if we want the WSF to play an important global role:

(1) First of all, we should clearly know what we want. For some, the Forum never was a space for building a global movement for political alternatives, but for shaping anti-imperialist alliances, in favor of some countries and against others. If we do not know what we are heading for, we should not even start to build something new.

(2) The WSF's principles should be redefined. The "open space" principle should not be used to make political acts impossible. It is indeed great if local movements can come and discuss the topics they work on, whether it is hip-hop or soccer. But next to these activities, there should be political conferences, focused on analysis, convergence, and dissemination.

Horizontalism and the fear of hierarchies are very justified, but they should not make accountability impossible. A light structure, with responsible and democratic leadership, is perfectly possible and badly needed.

(3) The founders of the WSF have done a great job. They took the initiative for the organization of the first global gatherings of social movements, and we should be grateful. However, today, a younger generation of men and women is needed, with knowledge of world matters, with enthusiasm and energy for bringing together the existing movements on all continents that want to work for a better world and that understand that global and local actions are needed.

(4) A WSF without a political message is useless. A new International Council with contemporary academics and intellectuals should be formed in order to guide the WSF. They should organize political debates on all major topics and limit the proliferation of thematic axes and events.

Of course, everything depends on the available resources. But if these can be found, I am convinced there are interesting people to be found as well, of different generations, to steer the WSF in new directions. The upcoming Forum in Mexico is probably the last opportunity we have to do just that, but if this WSF again resembles a big Persian market with purely Mexican colors, we should definitely stop.

Endnotes

1. Francine Mestrum, "Forum social mondial : une alternative démocratique," in *Mondialisation des résistances: L'état des luttes 2004*, eds. Bernard Duterme, François Polet, and Laurent Delcourt (Paris: CETRI/FMA/Syllepse, 2004).

About the Author

Francine Mestrum chairs Global Social Justice, which advocates for transformative universal social protection. Her research concerns the social dimension of globalization, poverty, inequality, social protection, public services, and gender. She serves on the International Council of the World Social Forum and the International Organizing Committee of the Asia Europe People's Forum. Her latest book is T*he Social Commons: Rethinking Social Justice in Post-Neoliberal Societies*.

Renewing WSF's Utopian Laboratory

Thomas Ponniah

The philosopher G. W. F. Hegel once noted that the political process that embodies a new universal impulse often perishes while its principle persists. What is the principle that the World Social Forum brought forward? My 2003 book *Another World is Possible*, co-edited with William F. Fisher, was the first book in English on the World Social Forum, the first to contend that the common theme that threaded through all the alternatives proposed at the WSF was a call for a participatory, radical democracy, and the first to argue that the Forum represented the initial steps for building a new left and a new global civilization.

Over the years, there have been a number of insightful interpretations of the WSF process: it embodies resistance to globalization; it epitomizes the latest struggle against imperialism; it manifests the power of identity; it is an insurgency against all forms of hierarchical discrimination, including patriarchy; it exemplifies the "movement of the multitude" or articulates the emergence of the epistemologies of the South. The interpretation that I offered did not and does not exclude any of the others but encompasses them within a common overlapping framework: the "alternative globalization," or "global justice," movements that emerged from the WSF at minimum call for a radically participatory democratic process to be integrated into all major economic, political, cultural, or ecological decisions. Social movements around the planet are too diverse to fully develop—at this time—a common substantive notion of the good, but they can bring forward a shared principle of the process of emancipation, that is, the call for a global radical democracy that extends across all social domains.

The Utopian Laboratory

The World Social Forum has been a utopian laboratory, a space for reimagining progressive politics, practice, and theory in the wake of what the late, great Immanuel Wallerstein once noted as the diminution of the welfare state in the "First World," the fall of the Soviet Union in the "Second World," and the exhaustion of various Southern national liberation projects in the "Third World." We can add that many of the alternatives presented in this laboratory also expressed the critique of modernity from various postmodern, or alternative modern, perspectives. The diminution, the fall, the exhaustion, the critique—all severely weakened the legitimacy of the three dominant left-wing, statist projects of the second half of the twentieth century. The various proposals presented at the WSF initially incarnated an attempt by an emergent global left to reimagine emancipation in the wake of the apparent decline of the progressive possibilities of the state.

The World Social Forum was founded by three long-time activists (Oded Grajew, Francisco "Chico" Whitaker, and Bernard Cassen) and their organizations as an event where various progressive social movements, theorists, and teachers—but not political parties—could regularly come together to mutually construct alternatives to the social degeneracy, cultural illusions, and asocial sensibility produced by neoliberal globalization. The Forum was imagined as an "open space" in which all progressives, that is, all those opposed to the current dystopian form of globalism, could voluntarily participate as equals in debate and solidarity. The process aspired to creating a situation in which dialogue among various members and movements in the public sphere was not distorted by the systemic pressures posed by state bureaucracies, the commodity form, or imperial intervention. These discussions inevitably led to a shared culture and a mutual recognition of and commitment to our common humanity. The Forum has been the subject that refuses to treat itself or others as objects.

The principle of creating a universally available public space in which all can voluntarily come together in camaraderie to discuss freedom has been admirable but inevitably riven with the contradictions of the system that movements wish to transform. The representation of women, of Africans, of minorities, of the indigenous, and of the poor has never lived up to the aspirations of the "open space" ideal. But, with that said, one cannot discount one of the Forum's greatest

successes: its attendance numbers have been stunning. In the 2000s, it regularly had over 100,000 participants at its events, indicating the range of the Forum's appeal, the talent of its organizers, and the extent of the public's desire for alternative forms of globalization.

While the future of the Forum is unclear, its influence is not. The impact of the Forum's call for participatory democracy has been evident in the Occupy movement, the *indignados* in Spain, the Arab Spring, and some of the leftist governments in Latin America. While the WSF never officially allowed political parties to be the principal organizers of its events, the Forum's influence has been obvious in countries like Bolivia and Uruguay. The discourse of participation has been regularly heard in La Paz and Montevideo, and while one can question the extent to which it has been genuinely democratic, one cannot ignore the prevalence of its use. The discourse is not only utilized by governments but also, significantly, by local social movements and the general population. The call for a new, genuinely egalitarian democracy has—in its various guises—been the common foundation for leftist struggles in the twenty-first century. It will continue to be so as the mainstream discourse of globalization evolves into a call for a world civilization that can accommodate humanity's diverse material, cultural, political, and ecological aspirations.

Politics

How does the Forum address the contemporary problem perfectly articulated by Roberto Savio: "The WSF has lost an opportunity to influence how the public understands the crises the world faces, a vacuum that has been filled by the resurgent right wing"? It is time for the World Social Forum to engage political parties and processes. The Forum emerged in a context in which the statist left had been delegitimized or at least severely weakened, and thus it made sense in 2001 to not substantially integrate statist representatives into the Forum space. Today—certainly since the 2008 financial crisis—the state has returned. The electoral option—symbolized in North America by people like Senator Bernie Sanders and Congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez—once again appears to be a viable way forward for some substantial, progressive change. The state is of course not the only way forward (we need strong international social movement

networks to pressure political parties to maintain their promises), but the state remains the most powerful potential vehicle and ally for social transformation.

The standard of a global, radical democracy will persevere as the key element of the international left, but if the WSF does not want to suffer the fate of past processes—those that pushed forward a universal impulse but perished while their principle persisted—then the Forum must reinvent itself. It must exceed the historical conditions from which it emerged. It must find a way—with all the contradictions, frustrations, and negotiations that this implies—to effectively involve political parties and actors into the open space.

About the Author

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A Dignified Death for the WSF

Pablo Solón and Mary Louise Malig

In life, everything has a cycle: a beginning, a middle, and an end. And what a beginning it was for the World Social Forum. The year was 2001, the emblematic success of the 1999 Seattle protests against the World Trade Organization (WTO) inspired so many, not only because they shut down the Seattle WTO Ministerial, but also because they showed and exemplified what a united front across sectors from students to labor to women to trade justice to people of color and too many others to do justice in a short piece could achieve. There were also protests in Prague and elsewhere; it was the coming out year of the anti-globalization movement.

This was the collective, global momentum with which the WSF was born. The idea inclusive, the target the World Economic Forum, and the goal to strengthen the movements and achieve victories. The 2003 global march against the war on Iraq was the proud achievement of the WSF: as media cited, between 6 and 11 million people turned out in at least 650 cities around the world in the anti-war protests.

This energy of the WSF, however, did not forge on. Instead, it faltered. Some would blame a bureaucracy that had formed; some would question the true participatory nature of the WSF, with rising costs for movements who did not have millions of dollars at their disposal. The dates were changed: Was the World Economic Forum no longer the target?

Most importantly, the WSF had gotten itself trapped in a quagmire. Were we there to achieve consensus and agree on a goal, concentrating our collective efforts in reaching it? Just like the 2003 march against the war on Iraq. Could we agree, for example, to all work on derailing the WTO? Or maybe the Amazon was the priority? So on, so forth. However, some argued that the WSF was a space—a space to discuss, debate, and share ideas and struggles. This was the beginning of the slow demise of the once great WSF.

As stated earlier, everything has a cycle. Hubris, though, is a dangerous quality to have, and in this case, as in many others, because of pride in former glory, many simply cannot let go. So instead, the slow decay, ugly divisions, and deterioration of the WSF took place in excruciatingly painful fashion, with a global audience watching.

This is not unique to the WSF. We humans tend to get attached to the spaces we have created and things we have achieved and often extend their existence beyond their intended lifespan or goal. This has been the case of many campaigns, networks, movements, and alliances that played a very important role in their particular moment and context, but that today drag their existence on without significant relevance.

There is no fault in being proud of making possible something great, innovative, and inspiring. But there is only foolishness in refusing to let go of that dying creation, out of touch with many issues eighteen years later. To rephrase Gramsci, the crisis lies precisely in the fact that with the dying refusing to die, the new will never be given the space or opportunity to be born.

The WSF International Council needs to acknowledge that they have fully run their cycle and that instead of dragging this process on, using precious time, energy and resources, they should take pride in what has been achieved and now give it the dignified death that it deserves. The WSF will not be forgotten; in fact, it shall become a reference for years to come.

Already, upon deep reflection, we have learned a number of valuable lessons from the WSF that we can take and use to strengthen whatever new form is born:

(1) Social movements—and the anti-globalization movement in particular—were able to stop in different ways the advance of neoliberalism, and even gave birth to different types of progressive governments that had some achievements but failed to build structural alternatives to neoliberalism, not to say capitalism, anthropocentrism, and patriarchy.

(2) We are in the middle of a systemic crisis that is much deeper than what we thought we were in, when the first WSF took place in 2001. This systemic crisis embraces us too—the political parties of the left, the social organizations, the activists, the intellectuals; we need to think deeply about our mistakes by action or omission. We need to get out of the justification

that everything is the fault of imperialism, the right, and the neoliberal forces. We are also part of the problem.

Yes, many will argue that there are new movements, students, young people of color, and many others, who had never even had a chance to attend a Forum. But with the WSF properly put to rest, a great many flowers of ideas and innovations shall sprout up everywhere. We must not underestimate the power of imagination, invention, and, most powerful of all, the pair of resistance and hope.

"Another world is possible" is not just a rallying cry; it is a goal we are all actively working towards, in our diverse ways. This will not die with the WSF; it will live on, until we achieve it. The arc of justice will bend our way, if we bend it together, in all our strength in diversity and solidarity.

The WSF has achieved so much and inspired so many, and will continue to inspire generations to come. So, this is not to disparage nor say let us forget about the WSF. No, this is about respecting nature's life cycles and the fact that however great the WSF may have been at its peak, it has now come to its end. But this is not a sad moment. We should celebrate, cherish, give honor, and bid adieu as we give the WSF the dignified farewell it deserves.

About the Authors

Pablo Solón, a Bolivian social and environmental activist, is the director of Fundación Solón and former executive director of Focus on the Global South. He served as the Bolivian Extraordinary Ambassador for Integration and Trade (2006–2008) and Ambassador to the United Nations (2009–2011) before parting ways with President Evo Morales following police repression of an indigenous peoples march.

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Recovering the Global in Diverse Strategies

Virginia Vargas

Looking Back

The historical significance of the WSF is undeniable. At a time when the alter-globalization movements were at their apex, the change in emphasis from confrontation to building institutions of alternative resistance helped inspire the great enthusiasm that led to the massive participation in the Forums.

The tension between the idea of the Forum as an open space and the idea of the Forum as a body that can take political stances has been present since the beginning. However, the WSF was never just an open space for hosting conversations. It has been a space for meeting, collective strategizing, and connecting different universes. The resistance to having the Forum evolve into a more organic space for taking firm stances in the face of the great global crises was due, for many, to what Savio recognizes as the Forum's democratic deficit. Precisely because of this deficit, the idea of making political statements was seen as reckless. Who decides? How do we choose? How do we avoid statements in defense of dictatorial regimes such as Nicaragua's or situations of democratic weakness such as in Venezuela?

These questions arise because the WSF could not just mimic the traditional modus operandi of leftist parties, with all the attendant patriarchal and colonial vices. Although political parties have a role to play, and many of their members have participated in the WSF as individuals, we should not be accepting parties as institutions as long as they resist their own democratization.

This democratic deficit did not mean that there were no statements at all. However, the early efforts to speak with one global voice have been weakening. For example, it has not been

possible, throughout these nineteen years, to increase the presence of movements and institutions located far from the locations of the successive Forums. This has been the result of a variety of factors, from the economic costs of travel to a de-emphasis on the internationalist character of struggles to the difficulty of incorporating new voices and movements.

At a Crossroads

It is clear that the WSF is no longer what it was. There are new movements at the local-territorial and/or regional and interregional scope, often fighting for human rights and against extractivism and land grabs. The movements participating in the Forums have new demands and are facing new challenges, such as climate change and the rise of fundamentalism and conservatism,
in particular, in Latin America, after the great progressive "wave" (which itself was not free of extractivism, homophobia, or misogyny).

The growth of the fundamentalist right requires both resistance and defense of past gains. But it also requires a thorough review of the political and economic "styles" of progressive governments, whose democratic deficit is also evident, at least in Latin America.

It is not that radical pluralism has impeded the unity of the movement. Such pluralism, recognized and legitimized, is the only thing that can foster a unity of struggle. And, although there is an enriching pluralism in the myriad movements (ecological, feminist, ethnic, racial, LGBTQ) in confrontation with today's untamed capitalism, allied with patriarchy and colonialism, such a pluralism is not a shared assumption across the different movements. In the face of the paradigmatic, epistemic, civilizational crisis, only an intersectional view of diversity can open a longer-range horizon in the struggle for change.

Therefore, the important issue is not unity itself, but the possibility of articulating the diversity of strategies for confrontation with the ecological, patriarchal, capitalist, racist powers that are implicated in all the major problems we face today. At this crossroads, it is urgent that we recognize that, in light of the progress desperately needed, only a critical review of our political practices can reveal how we must change our movements and institutions.

The Social Movements Assembly, created as a decision-making space where thousands of community members from hundreds of countries could come together to make movement decisions, was an important advance. However, the old vices of the actually existing left were a roadblock to inclusiveness. As a result, several other movements organized their own parallel assemblies: women's, indigenous, Amazonian, environmentalist, human rights, etc. The women's assemblies were enriched by exploring connectivity between women's, anti-capitalist, anti-patriarchal, and anti-colonial struggles. Even so, colonial tensions, also present in the WSF and within women's movements, manifested more than once, especially between Sahrawis and Moroccans, in the Senegal and Tunisia Forums.

Looking Ahead

The WSF has not preserved its original form because the contexts and conditions of movements, including the democratic institutions that they face, have changed. However, the new thematic and regional forums have the potential to have even greater impact. We have seen powerful thematic forums on issues such as migration and economic transformation (covering a range of issues from feminist economics to fair trade to the social and solidarity economy), as well as regional ones such as the Pan-Amazonic Forum (FOSPA).

However, these forums also reveal in some cases the weakness of such a democratic and diverse political culture as a basis for collective action. FOSPA is an important case: it has managed to stay relatively successful throughout all these years with its own dynamic and broader agenda. At the last event, the indigenous women's issues clearly infused the whole event. The campaign "My Body, My Territory" was launched with the establishment of a court to deliberate the impacts of bodily violence against indigenous women in different counties. In spite of its importance, two years after, the actual coordinating team seems not willing to continue with this path.

What has weakened, for now, is the global nature of these struggles.

These struggles are in more regional and interregional spaces, more local, more territorial. We need to devise strategies of recognition and dialogue across diverse perspectives. In this process, the "translation" theory of Boaventura de Sousa Santos is undoubtedly a valuable strategy

towards connection in plurality. For example, women are fighting not only for gender justice, but also for an agenda that, from women's perspective, incorporates ecological perspectives, human rights, economic justice, sexual justice, recognition of other perspectives and worldviews, etc. That is, a joint fight against the perverse alliance between capitalism, patriarchy, and colonialism.

Finally, we need to take a critical look at the WSF International Council as well. When the IC was established among existing movements and institutions in the first Forum, the possibility of including other members was set aside. There have been several attempts to change this: to incorporate the organizers of the thematic and territorial Forums; to expand the presence of new or more visible movements that were not clearly incorporated at the beginning, and that also corresponded to the new problems and dynamics that were occurring in the different regions. This is not to ignore the great efforts many have made to achieve greater democratic dynamism in the IC, to eliminate people who do not attend, to expand its contents, etc. However, nineteen years later, we have almost the same IC as we did in the beginning.

If the WSF continues, then the IC has to change. The inertia that hinders its evolution must be overcome.

The next WSF, already in preparation, will be in Mexico. It has the support of the Nordic countries, and it has an active team, which aims to incorporate more movements. I believe, however, that it will be the most limited of the recent Forums. Still, it will undoubtedly have significant participation of migrant movements, indigenous movements, ecologists, feminists, peasants, unions, etc. Let's begin to imagine how to connect further local-regional-global dimensions and how to connect with other global initiatives in the coming years.

Recreating the future requires recovering, and overcoming as necessary, the lessons from past experiences. Our challenge and responsibility is to pursue strategies for doing so.

About the Author

Virginia Vargas is a Peruvian sociologist, feminist militant, and co-founder of the Flora Tristán Peruvian Women's Center. Her work focuses on democracy, politics, and feminism in Latin America and the world. She has published widely and been a visiting professor at universities in the US, Europe, and Latin America. She participates in numerous networks and feminist initiatives in Latin America, such as Articulación Feminista Marcosur, and serves on the International Council of the World Social Forum.

Author's Response

Response to Comments

Roberto Savio

In the insightful comments in this month's discussion, there was broad agreement about the importance of the World Social Forum. The WSF opened a utopian laboratory (as Thomas Ponniah says), and the impact was felt worldwide. But the success of WSF gatherings was never under contention. Hundreds of thousands of people came from far and wide, paying travel and participation costs, to share their hopes and dreams. This was unprecedented, far exceeding our expectations in the early planning meetings.

While we agree on the WSF's historical significance, when we turn to the reasons for its decline, that unanimity falls apart. Some commenters point to weaknesses in the WSF's internal processes, political bickering, and lack of inclusive democracy; some highlight tensions between social movements and NGOs; some stress cultural conflicts (e.g., between Anglo and Latin worlds); others the decentralization that generated a multiplicity of workshops, often on the same subject, like in a fair; and still others argue that the costs of attending posed high hurdles for smaller organizations. Indeed, all these considerations are legitimate.

Despite the diversity of these critiques, we concur on one key factor: the International Council was not up to the task of consolidation and growth of the movement. The original Organizing Committee envisioned the IC as having a facilitating, not steering, role. Perhaps for this reason, the IC was not structured to offer a place for real debate (interventions were usually restricted to no more than three minutes). It never even engaged a rapporteur to record decisions to be passed on to the following IC meeting, or those not on the IC. The turnover of IC participants compounded the problem: the majority of participants at each meeting were new, so discussions ensued on issues that had previously reached consensus.

Nevertheless, every attempt to give more structure to the IC was rebuffed by those who equated organization with bureaucratization. As Francine Mestrum notes in her comment, "Horizontalism and the fear of hierarchies are very justified, but they should not make accountability impossible." Such accountability depends on open and clear communication, but the transmission of information from one forum to the next one was absent. Thus, panels repeated themselves at every forum without input from prior panels. This lack of continuity and cumulative knowledge was aggravated by the fact that forums were held in different locations, often with many different participants.

From the inception of the WSF, I worked on the Communication Commission. We were just a small group reporting to an IC that considered information technology a job restricted to professionals. The ways in which communication was more than information was not appreciated. At an IC meeting in Mexico, we asked every member of the IC to provide us with the names of ten journalists in their country so that we could organize a WSF information network. Only four did so!

In my view, a main cause of the decline of the WSF is that it became an inward-looking movement not accountable to the outside. Although at the beginning social media and the Internet did not have the reach they do today, if we had opened a process of communication and participation, the WSF could have retained its strengths while enabling many new organizations and activist to join the process. For the many who lacked the financial resources to attend, communication would have kept them in the loop. But communication is far more than its technical means; it's about a culture, and unfortunately this culture was sorely missing in the IC.

All commenters, in one way or another, call for the survival of the WSF as a vehicle for bringing together the new movements spawned in response to the success of globalization. But requiring these movements to physically attend the Forum events—the WSF process, as presently formulated—becomes increasingly obsolete.

Truly linking political actors takes much more than a few, episodic conversations. In particular, the WSF needs to be able to distribute papers with proposals for action. Without this, how can

we work with others? Surely not by asking them to join the IC, which would be a sure-fire way to bore people with bureaucratization, a fate other important organizations have suffered. In fact, the IC must be reduced in size, have effective and transparent rules, and accept its role as a steering body with responsibility for the content of the Forum, and for connecting it to institutions, organizations, and militants worldwide.

Many commenters of this exchange underscored how drastically the world has changed since 2000. Indeed, globalization has lost credibility, defended only by apologists for the status quo. It is hard to find anyone today who upholds the proposition that the "rising tide" of the market will lift all boats. The anxiety of those left out has fostered the rise of the likes of Trump, Orban, Bolsonaro, etc. In 2017, the 500 richest people on the planet became, collectively, $1 trillion richer than in the year before. In four years, they will have increased their wealth by an amount equivalent to the budget of the United States. This is clearly unsustainable.

Our world comes from a string of events driven by greed, a primary engine of history. First, the fall of the Berlin Wall was seen to signal the end of history, as capitalism would now unify the world. The Washington Consensus offered a manifesto and a blueprint: everything that did not create profits was a waste. Ideologies were abandoned for pragmatism, which was itself an ideology. In the 1980s, conservative heads of state like US President Ronald Reagan and UK Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher had undercut multilateralism, social justice, and solidarity. Now, Leaders of social democratic parties, like UK Labour's Tony Blair, contributed to that legacy. Blair's Third Way replaced social democracy's ambitions with resignation: since globalization cannot be stopped, let us work to give it a human face.

Then came the financial crisis of 2008, which ushered in a time of fear after decades of unabashed greed. Before that crisis, only France had a right-wing, xenophobic, and nationalist party. After, such parties flared up across the US and Europe, with Portugal the exception. The wars in Iraq, Syria, and Libya have led to massive migration, and in the immigrants fleeing the destruction of their countries, xenophobic forces found their scapegoat.

As all this unfolded, the WSF adhered to a clearly insufficient formula. Let us meet, let us discuss, let us share, in self-referential meetings, with no relation with the political process, and without

any practice of communication. Most participants were taking part in the political debates of the day, but at Forums had to abstain from any political activity. It was reminiscent of a church event where one met like-minded people and shared experiences and hopes to act upon after returning to their normal life. WSF participants in their normal life found plenty of actors engaged in action. New meeting points arose as people reacted to greed and fear, social injustice, and climate change, rendering the WSF antiquated and outdated. It continued to require physical presence, and the money to get there, to attend discussions with no place for action. Try engaging Greta Thunberg in this approach.

I am convinced that unless we take radical steps toward updating the WSF with mechanisms for interacting with the outside world and for some level of political action, it will continue to diminish and eventually die. The Talmudists of the WSF will say no, that doing so might sow divisions in the WSF, reducing its plurality and unity. But with the present trends ominous, a new formula can and must be found. The contributions to this debate are a clear proof that there is enough knowledge, vision, and experience for the task.

In this fractured and splintered world, we will know quite soon what the future of the WSF will be. In a world without values, its new identity could be to debate and renew the values—peace, social justice, solidarity, transparency, participation, among them—that can negate war, conflicts, and destruction. The rekindling of these values, which neoliberal globalization has eroded but are found in the constitutions of many countries, would be a powerful bridge to a revitalized movement. The WSF, as a holistic organization, could engage with all those that reject self-destructing capitalism's greed and fear to spread an affirmative discourse on values that can underpin the search for "another world."