

# From Reactive to Proactive: The World Social Forum and the Anti-/Alter-Globalization Movement

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*Given the prevailing research interest on the transition from anti- to alter- globalization, this paper examines where the World Social Forum is situated in the spectrum of movements against neo-liberal globalization. I argue that the progression of the anti/alter-globalization movements, while not linear or mutually-exclusive, can be traced along a continuum, marking the transition from condemnation, to advocating for change, to articulating means by which such change can be brought about.*

*Employing a historical sociological analysis and examining the context of its emergence, I suggest that the Forum, in addressing some of the aforementioned limitations, marks a transition from anti- to alter- globalization. Under the slogan of 'another world is possible', there is an emphasis on reforming rather than rejecting the dominant global economic system. However, at the same time, one must acknowledge that such a distinction is far from clear-cut, linear, or mutually exclusive.*

*The Forum has united the expression of a multitude of opinions, perspectives, and most importantly, strategies, linking representatives embracing both radical revolutionary thought emblematic of anti-globalization, and moderate reformers representing alter-globalization. This polycentric nature thus makes it difficult to posit with certainty the location of the World Social Forum*

*"If Seattle was...the coming-out party of a resistance movement, then...Porto Alegre (the site of the World Social Forum) is the coming-out party for the existence of serious thinking about alternatives" (Naomi Klein, activist, 2002: 158, emphasis added).*

After a decade of neo-liberalist indoctrination that there is no feasible substitute to the capitalist system, a significant back-lash emerged in the 1990s. Activists representing the global civil society were intent on exposing the failures and internal contradictions inherent in a system which justified the exacerbation of global stratification. The concepts elucidated by Antonio Gramsci contribute to a cogent understanding of the emerging anti-globalization movement, which can be seen as an effort to create a counter-hegemony to challenge the prevailing neo-liberal discourse.

While anti-globalization activists were effective in their condemnation of power-wielding financial institutions, many scholars assert that the protestors' legitimacy was undermined as a result of their inability to articulate an alternative form of global governance. In response, the alter-globalization movement is depicted as a reaction to address these

limitations in terms of positing alternatives. The *World Social Forum* (WSF), with its origins in the Brazilian city of Porto Alegre in 2001, is emblematic of alter-globalization, uniting a diversity of movements under the slogan, 'another world is possible'.

Given the prevailing research interest on the transition from anti- to alter- globalization, this paper examines where the *World Social Forum* is situated in the spectrum of movements against neo-liberal globalization. I argue that the progression of the anti/alter-globalization movements, while not linear or mutually-exclusive, can be traced along a continuum, specifically, marking the *transition from condemnation, to advocating for change, to articulating means by which such change can be brought about*. Employing a *historical sociological analysis* and examining the context of its emergence, I suggest that the *Forum*, in addressing some of the aforementioned limitations, marks a transition from anti- to alter-globalization, with an emphasis on reforming rather than rejecting the current and predominant global economic system. However, at the same time, one must acknowledge that such a distinction is far from clear-cut, linear, or mutually exclusive. The *Forum* has united the expression of a multitude of opinions, perspectives, and most importantly, strategies, linking representatives embracing both radical revolutionary thought emblematic of anti-globalization, and moderate reformers representing alter-globalization. This polycentric nature thus makes it difficult to posit with certainty the location of the *World Social Forum*.

An overview of key concepts elucidated by theorist Antonio Gramsci will be first examined, followed by an explanation of the process of *historical sociology*. This theoretical perspective reinforces the importance of examining the context leading up to the emergence of the *World Social Forum* which will shed light on its proposed location in the trajectory of movements. I will also explore the profile of activists who have embodied the various facets of the movement throughout its development. Such an examination is essential in order to study the evolving structure of the *Forum* and determine whether it has met its objectives of facilitating the inclusion of grassroots organizations, how its internal evolution has affected subsequent policies, goals, strategies of resistance and the very actors involved, and whether representation has been democratized since its inception.

## **Theoretical Frame of Reference**

### **Gramsci and Counter-Hegemony: The Transformatory Potential of Civil Society**

Many scholars, including Mittelman and Chin (2000), Cox (1999 and 1993) and Worth (2002 and 2004), have drawn on Antonio Gramsci's writings to understand the "hegemony of neo-liberalism that has provoked a series of crises and a counter-movement that seeks redress" (Amoore 2005: 4). The transnational drive to disprove the claim of free trade enthusiast and former British prime minister, Margaret Thatcher, of TINA or *There Is No Alternative*, evidences such a movement. Of most relevance to the present paper are Gramscian concepts of counter-hegemony, the comparison between *wars of movement* and *wars of position*, the idea of *transformismo*, and his assertions on the transformatory potential of civil society.

Antonio Gramsci's (1891-1937) most cogent ideas are consolidated in the *Prison Notebooks* composed in 1929 and 1935 during his incarceration by the fascist regime in Italy. His position as general secretary of the Communist Party evidences the influences of Marxist thought which permeate his work. In particular, Gramsci was intrigued not only by the asymmetrical power and social relations which were upheld and perpetuated by a dominant group, but also the omnipresent "expressions of counter-hegemonic consciousness" at the

collective level among those in a subordinate position. Such hegemony pertained not only to pervasive inter-class strife, but also that of international power relations, such as British supremacy during the First World War (Cox 1993: 41-3; Worth 2002: 300). The concept of hegemony is here applied to understanding the inordinate emphasis placed on neo-liberalist trade policies and relations as well as the positing of feasible, necessary, and desirable alternatives manifested in the emergent transnational nature of the counter-hegemonic movement. Catalyzed and embodied in the *World Social Forum*, the movement served to “bind[] disparate voices” into a coherent program demanding change (Mittelman and Chin 2000: 18-19). One can argue that TINA was soon contested and ousted by her sister, TARA, representing *There Are Real Alternatives*.

The pertinence and applicability of Gramscian theory is further extended when examining the polycentric nature of the *Forum’s* internal makeup. Indeed, divergent forms and strategies of resistance to hegemony and the perpetuation of inequities are subsumed under the rubric of *counter-hegemony* and can be divided into *wars of movement* and *wars of position*. The former, which is alternatively referred to as *wars of maneuver*, consists of direct assaults against the state which can take the form of labor strikes or military action (Gramsci 1971: 28). In contrast, *wars of position* constitute confrontations such as boycotts which disrupt and impede the everyday functioning of the state (Mittelman and Chin 2000: 18). A cursory glance can align the two strategies of the dichotomy of overtly disruptive *wars of movement* with its subtler counterpart of *wars of position* with the anti- and alter-globalization movements respectively; a distinction which will soon reveal its complexity in the context of the *World Social Forum*. Such a difference is particularly relevant when examining the myriad of activists and strategies represented at the WSF’s annual gatherings.

In the same theoretical vein, Gramsci’s notion of *transformismo* greatly contributes to an analysis of the *counter-hegemonic movements* against globalization. *Transformismo* refers to the cautioning against co-optation by those who are intent on preserving hegemonic forces. Having been a criticism unleashed by revolutionary activists on their seemingly more moderate counterparts at the *Forum*, such warnings were exemplified by the *Mumbai Resistance* fighters who, in the 2004 WSF, re-injected an element of violence into the roster of strategies used by WSF activists to offset or counterbalance what they perceived to be weakening of protestors’ demands (Worth 2002: 314). Gramsci also stressed the transformatory potential of civil society, a concept to which he ascribed the properties of both an “agent of stabilization and reproduction” of the status quo, as well as providing a potential realm in which a new social order could be founded (Cox 1999: 103-4). Similarly, the emphasis placed on the necessity of involving insurgence from below was a critical guiding principle for the organizers of the WSF to maximize representativeness and effectiveness of demands. Indeed, in light of the frequent exclusion and uneven and undemocratic trade policies incurred on the Global South in the context of the global economy, *Forum* coordinators emphasized that the “emancipator role” of a “bottom-up civil society” could only be incubated if the *Forum* itself took place in the Global South. Consequently, the first three *Forums* were situated in Porto Alegre, Brazil. This selection was predicated with the anticipation that a more democratic and inclusive roster of Southern activists would follow suite to voice their dissatisfaction and seek alternatives (Cox 1999: 108-9).

## **Historical Sociology**

While scholars have effectively used Gramscian theories in the context of movements against globalization, a corresponding and complimentary theoretical stance which guides

the thrust of this paper is the method of *historical sociology*. The emphasis on diachronic analysis prioritized by this methodology points to the importance of recognizing how key societal phenomenon are grounded in the context of their emergence, and how their structure is shaped by complex social processes. Indeed, a longitudinal study of key influential factors leading up to the conception of the *World Social Forum* in 2001 is critical in order to trace parallels, and recognize both inspirations and divergences from the original blueprints. Given the parameters of the paper, the examination of case studies is limited to those which contributed to the emergence and development of the *Forum*. The *historical sociology* methodology is thus apt in contributing to the query of the position of the WSF in the transition of counter-hegemonic movements against globalization. [Note 1]

### **The Global Scene: Contextualization of the World Social Forum**

If the 1980s were characterized by the unquestioned adherence and imposition of neo-liberal ideology, a feature which dominated the 1990s was a backlash at the local and international levels against the overt inequalities justified by this method of economic development. Indeed, the *World Social Forum*, the combined brainchild of the French ATTAC anti-globalization group and the *Brazilian Worker's Party*, followed in the footsteps of revolts orchestrated by the Zapatistas in Chiapas, Mexico in 1994, as well as the famed 'Battle in Seattle' of 1999. The two philosophies which guided the demands, critiques, and internal structure of the *Forum* were first a reaction against the seemingly solitary method of globalization aggressively promoted by the likes of Reagan and Thatcher; and second, the paucity of democratic inclusion in the decision-making practices of the predominant financial institutions. Each of these will be examined in turn.

### **There Is No Alternative (TINA) vs. 'Another World is Possible'**

The aftermath of the Great Depression led to an adherence to Keynesian principles which legitimated state involvement in the economy to mitigate the worst effects and inevitable inequalities of capitalist industrialization (Smith et al. 2008: 5). However, radical global economic restructuring in the 1980s retracted almost fifty years of the welfare state, replacing the Keynesian era with neo-liberalist ideology embodied in the *Washington Consensus* (Li 2008; Smith et al. 2008; Worth 2002). Touted as the much-needed impetus to economic development, former US president Ronald Reagan and his British counterpart Margaret Thatcher were the two most vocal proponents of this system of financial austerity. Among the different 'ingredients' outlined in this 'recipe' for economic fortification was liberalized trade and investment, deregulation, and the privatization of state-owned industries. These recommendations were accompanied by drastic cut-backs to governmental involvement and the provision of services (Ayres 2004: 12). In response to critiques of the ubiquitous inequities stemming from such harsh imposition and the withdrawal of a state safety net, advocates of neo-liberalism retorted with assertions of 'trickle-down' economics, claiming that the overall economic benefits would offset the temporary inevitable pain (Smith et al. 2008: 6; Fisher and Ponniah 2003).

Thatcher popularized the phrase *There Is No Alternative* or TINA to justify the global expansion of capitalism through the reformulated *Bretton Woods* ideology manifested in the financial institutions of the *World Bank* (WB) and *International Monetary Fund* (IMF) (Smith et al. 2008). A dichotomy was made between two worlds; that of *Davos*, the Swiss location of the *World Economic Forum* and the site of consolidation of global liberalization, with one of 'chaos', affirming the perceived lack of credible or feasible alternatives (Amin 2006). Skeptics assert that such policies only serve to reinforce the polarization of the world in

what *world systems* analyst Immanuel Wallerstein would characterize as the core and the exploited periphery. [Note 2] Samir Amin (2006), member of the *International Committee of the World Social Forum*, condemned the perceived 'senility' or selective memory of a neo-liberalist economic system which disregards the adverse and polarized effects stemming from its imposition.

Insistence of trade *über alles* has had devastating effects in both Third World countries reeling from a legacy of colonialism, as well as Communist nations experiencing the transition from socialism after the implosion of the Soviet Union. Financial liberalization provided attractive breeding ground for transnational corporations. Unregulated economic activities accelerated the 'race to the bottom', wherein countries feel compelled to eliminate labor and environmental standards regardless of the devastation and social repercussions that ensued in order to ensure continual financial investment. As Luis Ignacio Lula da Silva, Brazilian president and active supporter of the *World Social Forum* noted, "if the Amazon is the lungs of the world, then debt is its pneumonia" (George 1992: 1). Indeed, foreign debt is wielded as a political means of maintaining dependency through compelling developing nations to comply with the financial dictates in order to be eligible for continual monetary assistance (Keet 2000: 473). [Note 3]

The severe social dislocation which took place in the absence of state provided services had devastating impacts in Third World nations. Many were beset by violent financial crises, starting with Mexico, which declared bankruptcy in 1982 (Li 2008). The situation which McNally (2002) terms "the global loss of democracy," came to a climax with the collapse of the East Asian 'Tigers' in 1997. The 'Asian Miracle' of the (draconian) fiscal austerity program imposed in Thailand, Indonesia, Malaysia, South Korea and the Philippines prompted some short-term successes with massive inflows of foreign investment, and provided fodder for neo-liberal enthusiasts who claimed the benefits of their program. However, the rapid economic growth was not sustainable. Investors fled at the first sight of a weakening economy (Rupert 2000). Currencies drastically fell, and unemployment rates skyrocketed in countries lacking a state safety net (McNally 2002). As the Asian countries had become dependent on injections of ever higher doses of financial investment, the retraction of monetary assistance led to a severe 'crash' and dramatic withdrawal symptoms.

As neo-liberalism consistently failed to deliver promises of enhanced economic and social wellbeing, resistance percolated in the South, accompanied by a growing awareness in the North of the many contradictions inherent in this 'inevitable' economic system (Li 2008; Drainville 2002). One could say that this served as the incubation grounds of the transnational *counter-hegemony*, capable of challenging and even reversing the trends of neo-liberalism (Worth 2002).

### **The Counter-Hegemonic Discourse of Anti-Globalization: Another World is On Its Way**

Political economist Karl Polanyi was intrigued by the emergence of an increasingly unregulated market, documenting how it would spiral out of control and subordinate all in its path. However, one of his most important contributions was his assertion that such a situation contained the seeds for a *double-* or *counter-movement* which would restrict its unhindered acts (Falk 1998; Polanyi 2001 [1944]). As his seminal book, *The Great Transformation* (1944), was published at the end of the Second World War, Polanyi assumed that the state would be the actor taking the reins to lead this *counter-movement* in the form



of protectionist state policies. However, in a context of Reaganomics and drastically reduced governmental presence and clout characterizing post-World War Two society, such responsibility fell on the shoulders of an increasingly transnational civil society.

As evidence of what former *World Bank* (WB) chief economist, Joseph Stiglitz, condemned as the ‘misguided policies’ of IMF and WB-imposed neo-liberalist credo became more apparent, the rumble of dissent began to percolate from below. Frustration of powerlessness, awareness of increasing inequalities, and exasperation with an impotent government coalesced into what Gramsci (1971) referred to as counter-hegemony (in Mittelman and Chin 2000). Anti-globalization activists challenged assertions of the inevitable nature of an exploitative, top-down model of globalization. Taking to the streets, they voiced their dissatisfaction in an effort to create a counter-hegemony to the prevailing neo-liberalist discourse pervading economic ideology (Worth and Kuhling 2004). The Zapatista uprising in Chiapas, Mexico, and the so-called *Battle of Seattle* served as catalysts to this framework of counter-hegemony and opened the possibility for the *World Social Forum* to emerge as an alternative political body (Smith et al. 2008: 19; Worth and Kuhling 2004).

While the Eurocentric slant of global media often point to the 1999 ‘taking back the streets’ in Seattle as the pinnacle event which launched the anti-globalization movement, it can be argued that it was in fact the Zapatista insurgency in Chiapas which catapulted this issue onto the international agenda, as a force to reckon with (Teivainen 2002). On January 1st, 1994, the *Zapatista Army of National Liberation* (EZLN) took up arms to protest their governments’ acceptance of the *North American Free Trade Agreement* (NAFTA). The direction of this target was due to NAFTA’s role as an arm of neo-liberalism in which explicit double standards were evident, and which further disempowered the Mexican people (Curran 2008; Smith et al. 2008: 20). Coinciding their protest with the signing of this trade agreement set a critical precedent which ensuing anti-globalization protests followed. Namely, subsequent counter-events synchronized their protests with meetings of the global elite in order to both enhance their symbolism and relevance, as well as garner media attention.

The Zapatista uprising also significantly contributed to the framework and structure of the *World Social Forum*. The ‘open-space’ model of decentralized discussion and the exchange of ideas in an informal setting which *Forum* organizers adopted harkened to an earlier precedent established by the Mexican activists (Curran 2007). [Note 4] The WSF was born in this spirit of an ‘open space’ in which a “constellation of activists and communities around the world” networked, shared experiences, and built alliances, united by the shared desire to challenge the hegemonic neo-liberal discourse (Curran 2007: 8).

Furthermore, the Zapatista insurgency contributed to the transnational nature of the *World Social Forum*. Indeed, far from being an uprising limited by political borders, the Zapatistas’ avowed enemy was not the Mexican state, which many acknowledged was coerced into signing the accord. Rather, the thrust of criticism was directed against neo-liberalism’s hegemony. This distinction made such a struggle not nationalist, but one of a universal and even transnational nature (2002: 160). [Note 5] In the context of acknowledging the clear influence of the Zapatista movement in the configuration of the *Forum*, it is essential to note how they were thereafter excluded from *Forum* participation as a result of their avowed stance which included violence as a strategy for demanding change. This fact will be elaborated shortly, and evidences the complexity of pinpointing the proposed position and stance of the polycentric *World Social Forum* in the counter-hegemonic movements against globalization.

## The Battle in Seattle: “And the World Listened”

While the Zapatista insurgency had veritable impact on the counter-hegemonic discourse that was driving resistance around the world, Leite and Gil (2005) replicate the view of many researchers who locate the inception of the anti-globalization movement in its embodiment in a North American context: Seattle (Fisher and Ponniah 2003). The year 1999 documents activist protests surrounding the *World Trade Organization's* (WTO) Ministerial Conference. The “recalcitrant voices” of dispersed resistances including the Zapatistas are seen as but “isolated dissonances in an enormous choir tuned to the idea of globalization...An idea which would remain unchallenged” until a “new actor” arrived on the scene at the end of the 1990s (Leite and Gil 2005: 16). In spite of this perspective, which directed inordinate attention onto this singular event, the United States’ overt role as a leading proponent advocating for the global expansion of the neo-liberal paradigm made this unlikely location all the more significant (Ayres 2004: 20; Leite and Gil 2005). An unprecedented unity was achieved between a multitude of social movements, in which the “new commonality” of counter-hegemonic consciousness served to bind disparate voices into advocating for a coherent and shared vision of change (Mittelman and Chin 2000: 19; Leite and Gil 2005: 16). Beyond the more visible challenges to the tranquil atmosphere which hitherto surrounded such meetings of the global elite, the Seattle protest epitomized a counter-hegemony in the form of transformed consciousness and awareness in the Global South. Southern delegates attending the *World Trade Organization* meeting seemed to internalize the condemnations which were loudly being vocalized by the activists in the streets. [Note 6] In particular, they challenged the process by which they were denied access to the “Green Room” meetings in which the nations wielding power and wealth effectively excluded their developing counterparts from participating in economic decisions which would ultimately affect their countries’ domestic policies (McNally 2002).

The Seattle protests served as a forerunner for other events in the so-called Global North; “kick[ing] off an increasingly vigorous protest cycle that consolidated the global movement”, as well as coinciding condemnations as counterpoints to meetings of the global hegemonic elite (Leite and Gil 2005: 67; Drainville 2002). Among the numerous “transnational communities of resistance” which garnered media attention were the protests in Washington, DC against the IMF in 2000, and the demonstration in Prague, Czech Republic in the same year condemning a combined meeting of the IMF and *World Bank*. The year 2001 has gone down in social movement history as a year of prolific protests. Among the many events that is testimony to the growth of a counter-hegemonic consciousness and movement against globalization included the Quebec City ‘People’s Summit’ against the *Free Trade of the Americas Agreement* (FTAA), the subsequent demonstration conducted against an assembly of the G-8 in Genoa, Italy, and finally, the protests in the Middle Eastern city of Doha, Qatar against the WTO (Brooks 2004; Drainville 2002: 179). The active and often violent ‘taking back the streets’ of anti-globalization protestors harkens back to Gramsci’s ideas of *wars of movement* impeding the daily functioning of state and society in the verve to challenge neo-liberalism’s perceived hegemony (Cox 1999; Doucet 2008; Drainville 2002).

As 2001 was also the year in which the *World Social Forum* was inaugurated, it is instrumental to examine Brooks’ (2004) selection of the far from comprehensive list of the above mentioned counter-events as epitomizing the anti-globalization movement. The reasoning behind this concentration is fourfold. Firstly, the progression of the protests coincided with September 11th; an event which shook the confidence of the neo-liberalist

world. This watershed date also reinforced former President George Bush's assertion of the need to expand such economic policies to counter further acts of terrorism, which presumably, took place in contexts of economic backwardness and poverty, and not as a reaction to American imperialist policies. In what would prove significant in the WSF's configuration, this context resulted in waning governmental tolerance for protests, with labels of disloyalty and terrorism being attributed to the activists, and significantly undermining the legitimacy or demands of the anti-globalization movement.

Secondly, just as the WSF was created as a counterpoint to the *World Economic Forum*, the succession of protests surrounding the various meetings of economic power-holders resulted in such elitist gatherings taking place in ever remote locations, such as Qatar, in the hopes of dissuading and deterring protestors' attendance [Note 7]. Thirdly, a focus on the protests from Seattle to Qatar is warranted, noting how each subsequent demonstration escalated in protest tactics. As a result of exhibiting anarchist elements, such tactics led to increased police presence and violent repression leading to the ultimate "ineffectiveness" of these anti-globalization protests (Brooks 2004: 563).

In spite of former US President Bill Clinton's apparent willingness to incorporate the concerns of the Seattle protestors in his proposals for 'globalization with a human face', subsequent counter-events seemed to be met with increasingly repressive measures rather than an exhibited inclination to compromise (Rupert 2000: 199-203). This is in light of the fact that many concessions made by Clinton and the *World Economic Forum* were dismissed as efforts to co-opt the enraged civil society by making neo-liberalist economic expansion more palatable. Gramscists would refer to the perceived attempts to dilute activist verve as *transformismo* or the absorption of potentially counter-hegemonic ideas, making them consistent with the hegemonic doctrine, in this case, neo-liberal ideology (Cox 1993: 45; Doucet 2008; Gill 2000; Rupert 2000).

Indeed, it was this recognition of waning governmental tolerance in ceding to the demands made by the increasingly aggressive activists that spurred the organizers of the *World Social Forum* to restrict participation to non-violent protestors. As alluded to earlier, this decision resulted in the exclusion of the avowedly revolutionary Zapatistas, in spite of the former having set many precedents that the WSF organizers would implement. The anti-violence stance can also be seen as indicating a transition from anti- to alter-globalization, suggesting where the *Forum* can be positioned in this spectrum of activism.

A final factor which unites the aforementioned protests pertains to their involvement of "insurgents from below" (McNally 2002: 25). This is an interesting statement which will be analyzed in conjunction with criticisms that the *World Social Forum* solely represents the 'elites' of activists and NGOs. Street demonstrations coincided with public forums for networking and discussion; a distinction that Ribeiro (2006) equates with anti-globalization and alter-globalization, respectively. Similarly, adherents of Gramscian thought would attribute this dichotomy to the overtly disruptive *wars of movement* on the one hand, and its counterpart of the more subtle protests exhibited in *wars of position*, on the other (Cox 1999; Ribeiro 2006:4; Worth 2002).

### **"We Know What You Are Against, But What Are You For?"**

"Being anti-something can be politically useful, but only up to a point" (Teivainen 2002: 621). It was in response to allegations and criticisms such as this that the *World Social*



*Forum* was conceived. Indeed, the inability to articulate a credible alternative to neo-liberalism has become a problem impeding the legitimacy of the anti-globalization movement (Teivainen 2002: 628). As McNally (2002) asserts, “a favorite pastime of globalizers has been to label their opponents ‘anti-trade’” (29). In addition to lacking a unified sentiment of shared goals and demands, negative and disabling labels have dismissed such activists as terrorists, anarchists, radicals and communists intent on overthrowing the dominant capitalist system (Brooks 2004; McNally 2002). While anti-globalization protestors, their affiliations, and preferred strategies of resistance do span across this spectrum, the dispersive nature and lack of appointed leaders has impeded the ability to speak on behalf of the divergent voices and multitude of views in this umbrella movement. The media has subsequently gravitated to and harped on the more radical and violent elements and activists, framing such views as being representative of the movement’s aspirations and demands as a whole.

A microcosm of the “hotly contested [collective] framing debate” emerged in the midst of the Seattle protests in the form of journalistic dialogue (Ayres 2004: 22). In an article entitled ‘Senseless in Seattle’, *New York Times* reporter Thomas Friedman decried the WTO protestors as “a Noah’s ark of flat-earth advocates, protectionist trade unions and yuppies looking for their 1960s fix” (Ayres 2004; McNally 2002). An ardent supporter of the benefits and inevitability of neo-liberalism, Friedman provided fodder for pro-globalizers by characterizing protestors as advocates of ‘anti-globalization’. In response, noted Canadian activist Naomi Klein contested such a dismissive and overarching label. Clarifying that the activists were not in opposition to the globalization of economies, technologies and culture but were rather incensed by the current WTO-dominated neo-liberalist system, she argued that this condemnation centered around a system which facilitated the unfettered economic pursuit of power and unrestricted extension of the tentacles of transnational corporations, yet remained passive in the face of overt human rights violations and ecological degradation (Ayres 2004; McNally 2002). Klein (2002) contended that in light of this clarification, the *World Social Forum* gave much needed structure to a hitherto decentralized movement (160).

This shift from ‘opposition to proposition’, or what I call, ‘from reactive to proactive’, is epitomized in how the advent of the *World Social Forum* spurred the more popular use of the term, ‘global justice movement’. This modification in terminology was to signal “what it was *for* as well as *against*, and to shake off the negative ‘anti’ identity that misrepresented its goals” (Curran 2007: 7, emphasis added). Such a sentiment led to the adoption of the French *alter-mondialisation* or *alter-globalization*, reflecting the recognition that in addition to organizing protest events, activists were increasingly being compelled to formulate alternatives to the currently dominant and exploitative form of globalization (Curran 2007; Doucet 2008: 33; Klein 2002).

### **From ‘Anti-Davos’ to Porto Alegre: The Emergence of the *World Social Forum***

As aforementioned, one of the foremost criticisms that have undermined the credibility and potential effectiveness of the anti-globalization movement is the lack of proposed alternatives to the inequalities inherent in economic-driven globalization. Such a concern makes propositions as to the location of the WSF in the continuum of movements an intriguing question. Ayres (2004) reiterates the need to go beyond “diagnostic attribution” or identifying the source of the problem as embodied in neo-liberalism, to “prognostic attribution” which is concerned with the resolution of the perceived dilemma through the proposal of alternatives (14). Critics of the *Free Trade of the Americas* need to “move

beyond protest” to elucidate what would constitute a more just world (Doucet 2008: 21).

The organizers of the *World Social Forum* addressed this limitation by providing “an opportunity for an emerging movement to stop screaming about what it is *against* and start articulating what it is *for*”; a significant change which can be argued to mark the transition from anti- to alter-globalization (Klein 2002: 158, emphasis added). As proponents of *outra globalização* (“another globalization”) delineating a vision of a desired and mutually beneficial future, the WSF was billed as a ‘movement of movements’, integrating the varied objectives outlined by a multitude of social movements, including indigenous and women’s rights and the sustainable use of the environment (Doucet 2008: 18; Teivainen 2002: 628). Under the banner of ‘another world is possible’, the WSF provided a platform where activists could voice their challenges to the pervasive stratified and undemocratic nature of economic globalization, create networks with similarly committed individuals, and articulate their visions for an alternative form of a global economic system.

A microcosmic representation of the evolution of movements against globalization, albeit not a linear or mutually exclusive one, can be seen in the early development of the *World Social Forum* itself. As alluded to earlier, the WSF was created as a counterpoint to the *World Economic Forum* (WEF) which took place annually in Davos, Switzerland. In 1999, two years before the official launching of the *Forum*, various organizations demonstrated in an “anti-Davos” counter-event condemning the exclusive and undemocratic nature which characterized financial institutions and bearers of neo-liberal ideology. Among the various participants who were discouraged with the difficulty of organizing such an event were the French journal, *Le Monde Diplomatique*, and the *Association for the Taxation of Financial Transactions for the Aid of Citizens* (ATTAC); two French organizations which would play instrumental roles in the creation of the WSF (Teivainen 2003).

In February of 2000, Bernard Cassen, chair of ATTAC and director of *Le Monde Diplomatique*, met with Oded Grajew and Francisco Whitaker, coordinator of the *Brazilian Business Association for Citizenship* and member of the *Brazilian Justice and Peace Commission* respectively. It was at this meeting whereupon the idea of the *World Social Forum* was conceived. As an annual “global gathering of social movements, NGOs [non-governmental organizations] and other civil society organizations opposed to neo-liberal globalization, [the participants are all united and] motivated by the conviction that ‘another world is possible’” (Curran 2007: 7, emphasis added). The proposals created in such a global meeting would emphasize the need to go beyond the growing condemnation epitomized by protest activities against the neo-liberal model (Hammond 2005 in Curran 2007).

The first *Forum* was projected to take place in 2001 in Porto Alegre, Brazil. It would serve as “a space for civil society groups to coordinate actions and articulate shared visions for global change”. Thus, it was in direct response to the criticisms impeding the anti-globalization movement (Smith 2004: 413). While the first *World Social Forum* would be in direct contrast to the WEF, subsequent gatherings reinforced its more autonomous development. The indication of both a transition from being ‘anti’ to providing an alternative counter-event, as well as the increased self-confidence in the movement itself is epitomized in the organizers’ claim that “from now on, Davos will be the shadow event of Porto Alegre”; a significant shift from the ‘Davos vs. chaos’ dichotomy earlier posited by Margaret Thatcher (Teiveinen 2003: 13).

Three overarching criteria would ultimately guide the philosophy and structure of the *World Social Forum*. First, as a direct counter to the *World Economic Forum*, the organizers of the

WSF changed only one key word from its adversary's name to enhance its symbolism as well as demonstrate its more humane concern and affiliation. The second principle followed the path forged by counter-events initiated by the Zapatista insurgency, in that the annual gathering would be organized on the same dates as the WEF to both maximize the symbolic potential and also attract media attention.

Finally and most importantly was the criteria outlining that the *Forums* would always be hosted by a country in the South in order to address the perceived scarcity of democratic representation of Southern voices advocating for 'change from below' (Teivainen 2002: 623). To reiterate, adherents of Gramscian thought emphasize the importance of this principle in order to truly engage and launch the transformatory potential of civil society (Mittelman and Chin 2000). Such a decision was not only in response to the frequent and intentional exclusion of Southern nations in trade talks, but also was in recognition of the fact that media coverage of events like the Seattle protests overshadowed other significant changes that were taking place in the South (McNally 2002: 21)[*Note 8*]. Specifically, the founders decided that the *Forum* should take place in the Brazilian city of Porto Alegre. This selection can be attributed to the *Workers Party* (PT) having an influential political presence in that city as well as the willingness of the government to cover the expenses of hosting such an event bringing together activists from around the world. Moreover, Porto Alegre epitomized a model that 'another world' was indeed possible as a result of the participatory democracy and strong citizen participation which was instituted by the PT (Teivainen 2002). The latter rationale provided a critical influence to the demands, critiques, and internal structure of the WSF.

### **'This is What Democracy Looks Like'**

Charles Tilly (2004), noted social movements scholar, notes that there is broad correspondence and often mutual influence between social movements and democracy. As was previously mentioned, this fact may have influenced the selection of Qatar as a meeting place for the WTO in 2001, specifically as a result of governmental intolerance for any form of dissent (Brooks 2004). In giving a voice to the hitherto disenfranchised, the anti-/alter-globalization movement epitomized in the WSF worked to enhance the democratic attributes of the resistance, as well as that of globalization itself. Furthermore, Doucet (2008) notes the centrality of the "democratic imaginary" in the aspirations, condemnations and structure of the alter-globalization movement, in which activists again focused on the widespread and intentional exclusion of Southern delegates and the double standards inherent in trade talks among the global elite (18). In light of the "democratic deficit" of neo-liberal globalization, the horizontal and inclusive nature of the WSF has attempted to circumvent and remedy this perceived paucity. Democracy is seen here as a process as well as an end, facilitating and encouraging open and participatory forms of representation (Doucet 2008: 20-30). Echoing strategies adopted by the people of Porto Alegre, participatory democracy and decentralized decision-making has been integrated as foundational structures in the WSF.

However, despite such efforts, skeptics of the *World Social Forum* have condemned it of in fact taking on an undemocratic nature. For example, the first *Forum* of 2001 was criticized as being overwhelmingly 'white', both alluding to the racist nature of Brazil as well as the under-representation of African or Asian delegates; countries which had been hardest hit by neo-liberalist policies (Hardt 2002; Teivainen 2003). Instead of hindering the continuation or verve of the movement, such claims have served as the impetus which has spurred the self-reflection, self-reform and transition evident in the successive *Forums* (de Sousa Santos

2006). Acknowledging the challenges of a desire to be globally representative of those frustrated with neo-liberalism's unfulfilled promises, the *Forum's* organizers prioritized the need for a democratic and representative population by relocating subsequent *Forums* in the Asian and African continents. The fourth WSF took place in Mumbai, India in 2004, and WSF 2007 was hosted by Nairobi, Kenya, in the hopes that such proximity would enhance local and grassroots representation (Curran 2007; see *Appendix C*).

The *World Social Forum* seemed to be taking a turn towards representative 'insurgency from below'. Such a goal was largely achieved in Mumbai, particularly in the vocal and energetic presence of the *Dalits* or untouchables, who insisted that pervasive caste inequalities be put on the *Forum's* agenda. The instantaneous translation in a variety of languages and dialects in the various hosting cities of the *Forums* also points to the emphasis placed on democracy and intentional inclusion. Moreover, the "polycentric" *Forums* of 2006 which took place simultaneously in Caracas, Venezuela; Bamako, Mali; and Karachi, Pakistan, attempted to diffuse the Latin American concentration by attracting activists in the Americas, Africa, and Asia (*World Social Forum*). Similarly, a proliferation of regional and thematic forums, such as the *Asian Social Forum* and that of the Americas, has broadened the base of participants and topics covered. Significantly, indigenous concerns have been placed on the global agenda (Conway 2007; de Sousa Santos 2006; Leite and Gil 2005; Smith 2004; Buckman 2004).

While the limitations of the *World Social Forum* will be elaborated upon shortly, another daunting problem has been how to consolidate and embody the goals of a myriad of divergent social movements in terms of a platform of alternatives. Such a focus harkens back to the question which has guided this paper; that of where the WSF can be situated in the spectrum of movements against the exploitative nature of globalization. The dearth of WSF publications beyond the guiding *Charter of Principles* (see *Appendix A*) has been condemned by some as evidence of the ineffectiveness of the *Forum* to move beyond articulating alternatives to identifying clear goals and means by which they could be materialized. Indeed, even activist Naomi Klein (2002) criticizes the "opaque", chaotic and dispersive nature of the *Forums* in hindering coming to concrete decisions (Hardt 2002: 191).

However, it is critical to underline that a delicate balance must be reached between the diversity of representation and the synthesis of a document, which to many would substantiate the success of the *Forums*. The "gigantism" of the *Forum* has precluded such an act or attempt to consolidate the divergence of views into a presumably representative document. Interestingly, this is a feature which the organizers see as constituting a strength in diversity, rather than a flaw inherent in a lack of unity, again alluding to an emphasis on a democratic and decentralized rather than vertical or hierarchical structure (Doucet 2008: 22; Teivainen 2003: 8).

### **Combating 'Globalization-From-Above' With... 'Globalization-From-the-Middle'?**

The politics of exclusion and inclusion have pervaded the *Forums*, undermining organizers' efforts to create a truly democratic and 'globally representative' arena. Indeed, the cost of attending such counter-events has stratified the profile of interested activists, resulting in the wary perception of the *Forums* being a meeting for the 'elites' of counter-hegemonic globalization (de Sousa Santos 2006: 90, 95; Ribeiro 2006: 16). Accusations of being Caucasian and male-centric have peppered the media, alluding to what de Sousa Santos (2006) terms the paradox of "globalization from the middle"; a feature which significantly



undermined claims of global representation (70). In response, conscious efforts to relocate the *Forums* and integrate a comprehensive inclusion of new themes covered in subsequent meetings have indicated how the organizers have internalized such criticisms and have actively sought to remedy them (see *Appendix C*).

The selection of Porto Alegre as the location for the first three *Forums* was astute but had its limitations. In addition to being overwhelmingly 'white', concerns were of a more political nature. While the presence of the *Workers Party* ensured consistent state funding from the Brazilian government, this criteria conflicted with one of the mandates outlined in the *Charter of Principles* which precluded the attendance of political parties or state representatives to the WSF on the basis that the *Forum* is an apolitical space (de Sousa Santos 2006; Leite and Gil 2005). However, the doctrine has its own internal contradictions which were perhaps penned with Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva in mind. At the onset of the WSF, da Silva was the avid leader of the *Workers Party*, one of the *Forum's* founding groups, but was in 2002 elected to become President of Brazil (Teiveinen 2003). The 'loophole' that permitted his continual attendance at the annual *Forums* is reflected in Principle 9, which indicates that such leaders may be invited to participate in a "personal [and apolitical] capacity" (*World Social Forum*; see *Appendix A*).

Moreover, Janet Conway (2007) conducted a feminist analysis of participation at the WSF, arguing that despite the presence of many female activists, feminism as a discourse was "muted" (49). While women composed almost half of the attendants, they were "woefully under-represented as *speakers* in the major panels and conferences" (Conway 2007: 55, emphasis added; de Sousa Santos 2006). This deficit was significantly overturned with the decision to relocate the *Forum* to Mumbai, India in 2004, whereupon a proliferation of female activists representing the poor people's movements attended to contribute to the *Forum* discussion on women and globalization (de Sousa Santos 2006). Noted activists and speakers, including eco-feminist Vandana Shiva, reinforced the call to place patriarchy, caste inequality, grassroots organizations, environmental exploitation, and the need to secure food sovereignty on the *Forum's* agenda (Conway 2007; Smith 2004).

The Mumbai *World Social Forum* in 2004 was a "decisive step towards the globalization of the WSF process" (de Sousa Santos 2006: 86). The first *Forum* to be situated away from its Brazilian origins, it served as an important precursor to remedy the internal inconsistencies and flaws of its predecessors. Indeed, the success of drawing large numbers of Asian activists encouraged the relocation of the WSF 2007 to Nairobi, Kenya. The pinnacle event which overturned the overwhelmingly Latin American presence, the Mumbai *Forum* provided an opportunity for issues of women's concern to be articulated and prioritized, and offered a location in which grassroots activists found a greater venue for expression. Finally, as will be elaborated, Mumbai is significant as the site in which the confrontational *Mumbai Resistance* took place, challenging the assertion or perception that the *Forums* indicate the linear evolution of demands and tactics from 'anti' to 'alter'.

While the *Forum* which immediately followed the Mumbai convention returned to its Brazilian headquarters, 2006 was a year which featured an innovative polycentric WSF. Taking place simultaneously in Bamako, Mali; Caracas, Venezuela; and Karachi, Pakistan, it drew representatives hailing from Africa, the Americas, and Asia (de Sousa Santos 2006). The succession of WSFs after the comparatively more homogenous Porto Alegre events indicates that Mumbai was a watershed date which compelled the organizers to actively apply the guiding principles of "democratic imaginary"; an avowedly critical strategy influencing the structure and goals of the movement (Doucet 2008). Moreover, it



significantly broadened not only the topics to be addressed, but also the profile of activists present, from attracting the elitist elements of the anti-/alter-globalization movement to increasingly incorporating women and grassroots organizations [Note 9].

*Historical sociology* is thus a critical methodology to employ which not only indicates the context in which significant events take place, but also explores the dynamic nature of the occurrence itself through its evolution and response to pervasive internal weaknesses (Smith et al. 2008). Indeed, “the succession of [W]orld [S]ocial [F]orums has been marked by a strong internal labour of self-reflection that is guided by a desire to remedy structural and organizational deficiencies in view of rendering more faithfully democratic principles in practice” (Doucet 2008: 22). For instance, in order to circumvent the exclusive nature of the activists able to afford entrance, a collective fund was set up to sponsor activists from the South (de Sousa Santos 2006). As de Sousa Santos (2006) observes, the *World Social Forum* exemplifies an ongoing and cumulative “learning process” (57).

### **If Another World is Possible, How Will We Get There?**

To recapitulate the guiding question of interest, debates have surrounded the question of where the WSF is located in the trajectory of movement against globalization. I propose the use of a time-line depicting the anti-/alter-globalization movement as three concentric and overlapping circles. As *Diagram A* indicates, the suggested direction goes *from condemnation; to advocating for alternatives; to finally articulating means by which such substitutes to prevailing and unequal neo-liberal globalization can be brought about*, and rendered widespread and applicable. Interestingly, such a trajectory echoes what noted Gramscian scholar Owen Worth (2002) terms the “stages of transformation” of the “passive revolution”. He proposes that the tranformatory role of the civil society is nurtured and “starts with a current [hegemonic] order that is then challenged by both contrasting social forces and alternate ‘ideologies’... [T]hese serve as counter-hegemonic forces against the existing order” (Worth 2002: 299). The dominant perception has been that anti-globalization activists epitomize the first stage, with the *World Social Forum* embodying the alter-globalization slant in the second phase, and attempting to pass into the third stage. However, the lack of clear guidelines delineating how such aspirations can be materialized has been seen as a flaw inherent in anti-globalization and in the *Forum* in particular (Hardt 2002; Teivainen 2002).

*[Figure 1. Diagram A: Proposed Time-Line of the Anti/Alter-Globalization Movement and the Location of the World Social Forum (Source: Author)]*

Before delving into such an argument, three points bear mentioning. Of primary importance is that while the WSF represents the transition in objectives, advocating for alternatives rather than continual condemnation of those wielding exclusive economic influence, an internal structure predicated on open and democratic goals results in a myriad of opinions. A diversity of preferred strategies of resistance is represented under the rubric of a shared desire for ‘another world’. Secondly, the time-line ideology, while constructive and revealing, is perhaps inappropriate when positing about changes within the anti-/alter-globalization movement. While proponents of the *Forum* have advocated for the more proactive name of ‘global justice movement’ rather than its reactive counterpart of ‘anti-globalization’, the goals of *both* persist in tandem. Diachronic analysis reveals that the transition has been anything but linear; a feature which will be exemplified with the “Mumbai Resistance” case study.

Finally, as mentioned previously, neo-liberal enthusiasts have dismissed many of the suggestions and demands articulated by representatives and activists of the *World Social Forum* by pointing to a weak publication record. Many assert that the inability to collaborate on a shared document and a lack of tangible output in the form of published and disseminated papers is indicative of the decentralized and indeed chaotic nature of the movement. This latter feature will be examined shortly, as well as the question of whether such criticisms are justified.

It must be noted that far from reveling in an unstructured and utopian vision of 'another world' which is perpetually out of reach, the WSF organizers have compiled a 'Porto Alegre Manifesto' encompassing the diversity of views under the umbrella of the *Forum* (see *Appendix B*). The Porto Alegre 'Consensus' is a direct counterpoint to the *Washington Consensus* which has guided and legitimated neo-liberal extension and predominance. The 'Consensus' thus provides a counter-hegemonic discourse embodied in a doctrine which rivals its hegemonic counterpart (Ribeiro 2006; Buckman 2004).

Divided into three themes of economic measures, mandates for peace and justice, and democratic objectives, many parallels can be made with anti-globalization predecessors. For instance, the document includes demands for the cancellation of debilitating debts restraining Third World countries on a perpetual debt treadmill, harkening back to *Jubilee 2000* and implementation of the *Tobin Tax*. [Note 10] The latter progressive taxation system would charge corporations and governments fees which would then be reallocated towards addressing societal needs. It is an effort articulated by the French ATTAC organization with the aim of "social democracy" and the objective of bolstering the power of the state, reminiscent of the Keynesian era (Falk 1998: 133). Penned in 2005, the *Porto Alegre Consensus* points to the influence of the Mumbai WSF which took place a year earlier, with food security and protection against environmental degradation being prominent elements of the 'Manifesto' (de Sousa Santos 2006). Moreover, the insistence on participatory democracy alludes back to the model exemplified in the city of Porto Alegre, as well as the overarching goal of inclusiveness in the WSF (Klein 2002).

As an arena in which a multitude of views representing diverse social movements can be expressed, the *World Social Forum* accommodates activists who can be grouped as either revolutionaries or reformers; a microcosm of the anti-/alter-globalization movement (Curran 2007; McNally 2002). The divergence of participants can be illustrated with the comparison between those who advocate for the complete destruction of the capitalist system, asserting that inequality is an inherent feature of this 'midwife' of neo-liberalism, and those who prefer to remedy and, importantly, democratize the existing global economy (Smith et al. 2008). It is instructive to again look at the parallels with Gramsci's dichotomy of *wars of movement*, or frontal and often aggressive assaults challenging the hegemony, legitimacy and functioning of the state, and its non-violent counterpart of collective resistance embodied in *wars of position* (Cox 1993; Gramsci 1971; Mittelman and Chin 2000). As Gill (2000) notes, activists affiliating themselves with the anti-capitalist goals of the Zapatistas argued against such perceived co-optation or Gramscian *transformismo* of their more moderate counterparts, insisting that "fundamental reform means rules that empower the people of the world to make the decisions about how they live their lives - *not* the [renamed] transnational CEO's or their purchased political leaders" (155, emphasis added). Interestingly, while a diversity of both 'anti' and 'alter' opinions have been voiced at the *Forum*, representing views and strategies at both ends of the spectrum, elements of the *Porto Alegre Manifesto* such as the Tobin Tax on corporations seem to more firmly align the

*Forum* with the reformist or ‘alter’ perspective (Smith et al. 2008; Worth 2002). For example, the last principle, “reform international institutions based on the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* and incorporate the *World Bank*, IMF and WTO into the *United Nations*” appears to be the only tangible idea which indicates the means by which corporate accountability and institutional transparency can be achieved under the governing body of the United Nations. It is this vigorous debate on the best ways of achieving such ambitious goals that divides *Forum* participants and again obscures the location of the *Forum* in the suggested diagram (Curran 2007; see *Appendix B*).

Can a dichotomy be then posited between revolutionary and reform, repudiation and regulation, and anti- and alter-globalization respectively (Falk 1998)? The Mumbai WSF of 2004 might suggest this perception. Splits over the perceived ‘correct’ and most effective way of bringing about significant and economic challenges to the hegemonic discourse fueled the ‘*Mumbai Resistance*’; a parallel meeting of more radical activists who condemned the WSF position as offering too limited a critique of capitalism. Over three hundred grassroots organizations participated in this alternate forum, many espousing violence as a political tactic, the latter which has been rejected on grounds of the WSF *Charter*. The *Mumbai Resistance* warned about co-optation by President Clinton’s hollow promises of “globalization with a human face”, the *World Economic Forum*’s desire to make economic expansion more ‘palatable’ through “global governance”, and Joseph Stiglitz, former *World Bank* chief economist who now condemned the ‘misguided policies’ of the IMF (Drainville 2002: 174; Research Unit for Political Economy 2003; Rupert 2000; Smith 2004) . The transition between confrontational methods associated with adherents of anti-globalization and the more moderate methods of the global justice movement which have been disparaged of harboring co-optation elements is thus far from linear. Parallel struggles persist between those affiliating with Zapatista tactics and the reformist method of the WSF, with the *Mumbai Resistance* being a case in point.

Has such a diversity of opinions precluded the effectiveness of the *World Social Forum*? In the words of Charles Tilly (2004), has the objective and desire for internationalist expansion to give voice to the disenfranchised backfired, with transnationalization bringing about “dedemocratization”, resulting in not only a hierarchy of opinions, but also the inability to produce a document that encompasses its goals (131-2, 143)? As a plural, inclusive, and diversified component of the anti/alter-globalization movement, the WSF does not speak with one voice nor does it profess to represent the goals and demands of the participants as a whole (*Charter of Principles, World Social Forum*; de Sousa Santos 2006). While critics have argued that the avowedly democratic structure of the *Forum* which has encouraged the participation of a myriad of social movements is the WSF’s ‘Achilles heel’ and a “wasted opportunity”, organizers counter that this diversity is actually the strength of the *Forum* (Smith 2004: 418).

The time-line metaphor of knowing where to position the WSF either between the first and second, or the second and third concentric circles is again beset by difficulties when examining the issue of concrete output in the form of a document. In line with the diversity of views articulated at the *Forums*, WSF organizers have purposely avoided disseminating documents which would profess to represent or consolidate the diversity of views present. Short of the guiding principles enshrined in the WSF *Charter* and the alternatives suggested in the *Consensus*, it is not the production of documents to which the organizers attribute success, but the fostering and incubation of ideas which indicate a less tangible, but arguably more revealing measure of effectiveness. Thus, such condemnations on the part of

skeptics is unwarranted, as while alternative ideas can be generalized, it is unfeasible and indeed irrelevant to attempt to produce a document that could even hope to make overarching recommendations devoid of context-specific conditions to alleviate pervasive problems exacerbated by economic globalization. The *World Social Forum* is thus a world public sphere. Perhaps a more appropriate and instructive illustration of the proposed location of the *World Social Forum* would take the shape of a Venn's Diagram, in which overlapping ideas and strategies take place concurrently (see *Diagram B*). To recapitulate, the goal of the WSF is not to act as a publishing house; the publication of documents it leaves to individual participants and organizations. Its avowed raison d'être is rather to serve as a venue for the enlightened exchange of ideas.

[Figure 2. *Diagram B: Proposed Time-Line of the Anti/Alter-Globalization Movement and the Location of the World Social Forum (Source: Author)*]

### **Conclusion: Is Anti to Alter what Action is to...Talking?**

Many debates have surrounded the *World Social Forum*; is it a political space or a political movement (Curran 2007)? Is it an arena or actor (Teiveinan 2003)? Such dichotomies can be extended to the alter- and anti-globalization movements, which may be disconcerting to some to note the perceived impotence of the former. However, the structure of the *Forum* was designed as such to facilitate the networking, sharing of experiences and strategies to expose activists to their counterparts who are equally committed to bringing about change. In a similar relationship of a teacher guiding students, the *Forum* is designed to foster impetus, enthusiasm and awareness, and impart such knowledge onto the activists on whom the onus is then directed to construct their own (transnational) networks to demand change. Thus the effectiveness of the *World Social Forum* should not be measured by whether a transition has been made between "talking shop" and "talking power", nor whether it has generated uniform proposals, documents or political statements that profess to represent the opinions of all involved. Nor should its role be evaluated on the basis of whether it has provided a manual or panacea for change, but rather whether activists have emerged emboldened with the need to take action. As Teiveinan (2003) argues, "political action is the responsibility of each individual and the coalitions they form, not an attribute of the forum" (9). As a 'movement of movements', it is thus possible to be an arena and actor simultaneously.

### **Notes**

1. For more information, see Charles Tilly. 1980. "Historical Sociology". In *Current Perspectives in Social Theory*. Eds. Scott G. McNall & Gary N. Howe. Vol. I. Greenwich, Connecticut: JAI Press.
2. The manifestation of the neo-liberalist credo is best embodied in *Structural Adjustment Programs* (SAPs), which critics have condemned as neo-colonial means of economic extraction.
3. It is revealing to note that the amount of funds allocated to servicing or repaying the interest as well as the debt itself often exceeds that spent on education and healthcare. Indeed, the "lost decade" of the 1980s witnessed an unprecedented transfer of money from the South to the North, and predominantly to the financial institutions (George 1992:14; Black 2002:24). Once they had been integrated into the neo-liberalist system, countries were relegated to a treadmill of perpetual debt.
4. In 1996, Subcommandante Marcos, leader of the EZLN, issued an invitation to activists and social movements around the globe to participate in the *First Intercontinental Meeting for Humanity and*

*Against Neo-liberalism*. Despite the fact that the *Encuentro* or global meeting of like-minded thinkers took place in the depths of the Mexican jungles, the location did not dissuade the thousands of activists who participated in this “hand-crafted conference” (Curran 2008; Smith 2004: 414).

5. The transnational nature of this counter-hegemonic movement was furthered by *Jubilee 2000*. This event was largely spearheaded by Northern activists who argued that the ‘odious debts’ were relegating such countries to a perpetual status of underdevelopment (Goldstein, Pevehouse and 2008: 479). Southern anti-debt groups have chimed in, arguing that the debts have already been repaid, “in the incalculable terms of social and environmental damage, political unrest, conflict and wars and profound human ...suffering” incurred in the pursuit of *Structural Adjustment Programs* (Keet 2000: 463). This North-South partnership would also prove to be significant in the structure of the *World Social Forum*, in an effort to be globally representative of those burdened under the yoke of neo-liberalism.

6. As if emboldened by the protestors shouting “this is what democracy looks like”, the representatives from the South became more assertive, denouncing the frequent ‘closed-door policies’ and manipulations of their wealthier counterparts. As the “protests in the streets became more defiant, so the attacks on lack of transparency and accountability inside the conference grew louder” (McNally 2002: 24).

7. The city of Doha, Qatar is a revealing example. Its selection as the ideal location for the WTO conference in 2001 was predicated not only on desires to forge improved economic alliances between the Middle East and post-9/11 United States, but also because the monarchical government had “little tolerance for public protests of any sort” and was willing to impose repressive measures to ensure the success of its hosted meeting (Brooks 2004: 572). Indeed, it ended up being one of the most productive rounds of WTO negotiations.

8. This included the successful Indonesian demands for the resignation of President Suharto in 1997 in the aftermath of economic crises brought about by neo-liberal adherence (McNally 2002: 21).

9. For instance, the Guyanese *Red Thread Women’s Development Organization* was able to network and gain exposure for the struggles on behalf of women in Caracas during the polycentric Forum (Trotz 2007: 77).

10. Jubilee 2000 refers to the international coalition movement which took place in over 40 countries that called for the cancellation of Third World debt by the year 2000.

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## **Appendix A**

### ***World Social Forum Charter of Principles***

*The committee of Brazilian organizations that conceived of, and organized, the first World Social Forum, held in Porto Alegre from January 25th to 30th, 2001, after evaluating the results of that Forum and the expectations it raised, consider it necessary and legitimate to draw up a Charter of Principles to guide the continued pursuit of that initiative. While the principles contained in this Charter - to be respected by all those who wish to take part in the process and to organize new editions of the World Social Forum - are a consolidation of the decisions that presided over the holding of the Porto Alegre Forum and ensured its success, they extend the reach of those decisions and define orientations that flow from their logic.*

1. The *World Social Forum* is an open meeting place for reflective thinking, democratic debate of ideas, formulation of proposals, free exchange of experiences and interlinking for effective action, by groups and movements of civil society that are opposed to neo-liberalism and to domination of the world by capital and any form of imperialism, and are committed to building a planetary society directed towards fruitful relationships among Humankind and between it and the Earth.

2. The *World Social Forum* at Porto Alegre was an event localized in time and place. From now on, in the certainty proclaimed at Porto Alegre that "another world is possible", it becomes a permanent process of seeking and building alternatives, which cannot be reduced to the events supporting it.

3. The *World Social Forum* is a world process. All the meetings that are held as part of this process have an international dimension.

4. The alternatives proposed at the *World Social Forum* stand in opposition to a process of globalization commanded by the large multinational corporations and by the governments and international institutions at the service of those corporations' interests, with the complicity of national governments. They are designed to ensure that globalization in

solidarity will prevail as a new stage in world history. This will respect universal human rights, and those of all citizens – men and women – of all nations and the environment and will rest on democratic international systems and institutions at the service of social justice, equality and the sovereignty of peoples.

5. The *World Social Forum* brings together and interlinks only organizations and movements of civil society from all the countries in the world, but it does not intend to be a body representing world civil society.

6. The meetings of the *World Social Forum* do not deliberate on behalf of the *World Social Forum* as a body. No-one, therefore, will be authorized, on behalf of any of the editions of the Forum, to express positions claiming to be those of all its participants. The participants in the Forum shall not be called on to take decisions as a body, whether by vote or acclamation, on declarations or proposals for action that would commit all, or the majority, of them and that propose to be taken as establishing positions of the Forum as a body. It thus does not constitute a locus of power to be disputed by the participants in its meetings, nor does it intend to constitute the only option for interrelation and action by the organizations and movements that participate in it.

7. Nonetheless, organizations or groups of organizations that participate in the Forums meetings must be assured the right, during such meetings, to deliberate on declarations or actions they may decide on, whether singly or in coordination with other participants. The *World Social Forum* undertakes to circulate such decisions widely by the means at its disposal, without directing, hierarchizing, censoring or restricting them, but as deliberations of the organizations or groups of organizations that made the decisions.

8. The *World Social Forum* is a plural, diversified, non-confessional, non-governmental and non-party context that, in a decentralized fashion, interrelates organizations and movements engaged in concrete action at levels from the local to the international to build another world.

9. The *World Social Forum* will always be a forum open to pluralism and to the diversity of activities and ways of engaging of the organizations and movements that decide to participate in it, as well as the diversity of genders, ethnicities, cultures, generations and physical capacities, providing they abide by this Charter of Principles. Neither party representations nor military organizations shall participate in the Forum. Government leaders and members of legislatures who accept the commitments of this Charter may be invited to participate in a personal capacity.

10. The *World Social Forum* is opposed to all totalitarian and reductionist views of economy, development and history and to the use of violence as a means of social control by the State. It upholds respect for Human Rights, the practices of real democracy, participatory democracy, peaceful relations, in equality and solidarity, among people, ethnicities, genders and peoples, and condemns all forms of domination and all subjection of one person by another.

11. As a forum for debate, the *World Social Forum* is a movement of ideas that prompts reflection, and the transparent circulation of the results of that reflection, on the mechanisms and instruments of domination by capital, on means and actions to resist and overcome that domination, and on the alternatives proposed to solve the problems of exclusion and social inequality that the process of capitalist globalization with its racist,

sexist and environmentally destructive dimensions is creating internationally and within countries.

12. As a framework for the exchange of experiences, the *World Social Forum* encourages understanding and mutual recognition among its participant organizations and movements, and places special value on the exchange among them, particularly on all that society is building to centre economic activity and political action on meeting the needs of people and respecting nature, in the present and for future generations.

13. As a context for interrelations, the *World Social Forum* seeks to strengthen and create new national and international links among organizations and movements of society, that – in both public and private life – will increase the capacity for non-violent social resistance to the process of dehumanization the world is undergoing and to the violence used by the State, and reinforce the humanizing measures being taken by the action of these movements and organizations.

14. The *World Social Forum* is a process that encourages its participant organizations and movements to situate their actions, from the local level to the national level and seeking active participation in international contexts, as issues of planetary citizenship, and to introduce onto the global agenda the change-inducing practices that they are experimenting in building a new world in solidarity.

*Approved and adopted in São Paulo, on April 9, 2001, by the organizations that make up the World Social Forum Organizing Committee, approved with modifications by the World Social Forum International Council on June 10, 2001.*

Source: <http://www.forumsocialmundial.org.br/>

## **Appendix B**

### **Porto Alegre Manifesto/Consensus**

#### **Summary of Twelve Proposals**

##### *Economic Measures*

1. Debt cancellation for southern countries.
2. Implement international tax on financial transactions, i.e. Tobin tax.
3. Dismantle all tax havens and corporate havens (described as “paradises”).
4. Universal right to employment, social protection and pensions.
5. Promote fair trade and reject all free trade agreements and WTO laws, emphasizing the importance of education, health, social services and cultural rights over commercial rights.
6. Guarantee of food security to all countries by promoting rural, peasant agriculture.
7. Outlaw patenting of knowledge on living things and privatization of “common goods for humanity,” i.e. water.

##### *Peace and Justice*

8. Use public policies to fight discrimination, sexism, xenophobia, anti-Semitism and racism and fully recognize the political, cultural and economic rights of indigenous peoples.
9. Take steps to end environmental destruction and the greenhouse effect using alternative development models.
10. Dismantle all foreign military bases and the removal of troops from all countries except those under the explicit mandate of the United Nations.



## Democracy

11. Guarantee the right to information and the right to inform through legislation that would end concentration of media ownership, guarantee the autonomy of journalists, and favor alternative media.

12. Reform international institutions based on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and incorporate the World Bank, IMF and WTO into the United Nations. Source: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Porto\\_Alegre\\_Manifesto](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Porto_Alegre_Manifesto)

## Appendix C

### Chronology and Location of *World Social Forums*

*World Social Forum* 2001 - Porto Alegre, Brazil

*World Social Forum* 2002 - Porto Alegre, Brazil

*World Social Forum* 2003 - Porto Alegre, Brazil

*World Social Forum* 2004 - Mumbai, India

*World Social Forum* 2005 - Porto Alegre, Brazil

*World Social Forum* 2006 - Polycentric Forum, taking place simultaneously in Bamako, Mali; Caracas, Venezuela; and Karachi, Pakistan

*World Social Forum* 2007 - Nairobi, Kenya

*World Social Forum* 2009 - 'Global Call for Action'

*World Social Forum* 2009 - Belem, Brazil

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