

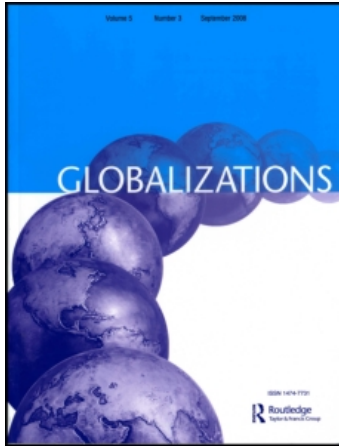
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The Global Anti-War Movement Within and Beyond the World Social Forum

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ABSTRACT *This article contributes to the ongoing activist debate over the nature and future of the World Social Forum as well as to scholarly reflection and theorization of the Forum as an open space versus a more action-oriented and partisan organization at the current stage of global struggles against neoliberalism and war. It does so by addressing whether and to what extent the WSF's organizational ethos of bounded diversity plus decentralization has fostered the creation and cross-pollination of movements at the transnational level of contention by analyzing the emergence of a global anti-war movement within the WSF. It finds that the Forums have provided a hospitable environment for movement crossovers to shift priorities, resources, frames, claims, campaign strategies, and coalitions in response to the emergent threat of war. It then addresses the more polemical critique of whether the WSF inhibits alliance-building with the most decisive anti-neoliberal and anti-imperial forces of our time, by examining the Beirut and Cairo anti-war conferences. It finds that the polarization and power imbalances exacerbated in these two initiatives suggest that the proscriptions delineated in the WSF Charter aimed at preserving and promoting diversity within the Forum milieus should be maintained.*

Este artículo contribuye tanto al debate en curso sobre la naturaleza y el futuro del Foro Social Mundial, como a la reflexión académica y la teorización del Foro como un espacio abierto, contra una organización más orientada a la acción y partidaria ante el estado actual de las luchas globales contra el neoliberalismo y la guerra. Lo hace tratando siempre, y hasta qué punto, la idiosincrasia organizacional del FSM de diversidad limitada, más la descentralización ha fomentado la creación e interpolinización de movimientos al nivel trasnacional de contención, mediante el análisis del surgimiento de un movimiento global antimilitarista dentro del FSM. Encuentra que los Foros han proporcionado un medio ambiente hospitalario para la transición de movimientos para cambiar las prioridades, los recursos, los marcos, las demandas, las estrategias de campaña y las alianzas en respuesta a

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la amenaza emergente de guerra. Luego habla de la crítica más polémica sobre si el FSM inhibe la creación de alianzas con las fuerzas más decisivas anti neoliberales y anti imperiales de nuestro tiempo, examinando las conferencias antimilitaristas de Beirut y del Cairo. Halla que la polarización y los desequilibrios de poder empeorados en estas dos iniciativas, sugieren que las procripciones delineadas en el Acta del FSM dirigida a preservar y promover la diversidad dentro del ambiente del foro, deberían mantenerse.

本文有助于当下关于世界社会论坛性质和未来的行动主义的辩论，以及在当前反对新自由主义和战争的全球斗争舞台上，相对于更为行动导向和党派化的组织而言以开放空间形式存在的世界社会论坛的学术反思和理论化。文章立足跨国层面上的争论，通过分析世界社会论坛中全球范围反战运动的兴起，讨论了世界社会论坛的有限多样性外加非集中化这一组织精神是否以及在多大程度上促进了运动的兴起和跨国异文化传播。文章发现，该论坛已经为跨界运动参与者回应新出现的战争威胁时改变优先顺序、资源、框架、宣言、运动策略和联盟提供了一个友善的环境。通过分析贝鲁特和开罗的反战会议，文章继而阐明一个更具争论性的批评，即世界社会论坛是否以我们时代最具决定性的反新自由主义和反帝力量抑制了联盟建设。它发现，在这两项倡议中加剧的极化和权力失衡表明，应该保持世界社会论坛宪章中旨在论坛环境下维护和推进多样性的律令。

Keywords: World Social Forum, anti-war movement, alter-globalization movement

The World Social Forum (WSF), as conceived by its Brazilian founders and supported by the hundreds of thousands of activists converging in its many spaces since its inception in 2001, aims to incubate and articulate diverse social movements seeking to construct ‘other possible worlds’ beyond neoliberal globalization and all forms of imperialism. Running alongside the WSF’s maturation has been a spirited debate and critical assessment as to how effective the Forum has been in achieving these ambitious goals. Many question whether the struggles against neoliberalism and neo-imperialism could be better served by transforming the WSF, or even by casting it aside altogether, in favor of a new International, a global political party, an organizational ally engaging and supporting leftwing governments, or a partisan confederation representing transnational, regional, and local social movements and other civil society actors. As the recent crisis of global finance capitalism collides with ongoing threats from US military hegemony, planetary climate change, and rising food prices and continued debt bondage across the Global South, debates surrounding the WSF’s appropriate structure, functions, and role with respect to progressive social forces mobilizing in response to these crises have grown ever more pressing.¹

Calls to ‘reform the Forum’ present three main options: to remain an open and horizontal space that continues to innovate on its decentralized model; to considerably restructure itself toward improving its efficiency in articulating movements; or to be abandoned and replaced with some other organizational form. What these critiques have in common is that each takes issue with the ways that the WSF methodology tries to promote and at the same time protect diversity and decentralization within its spaces and, by extension, in the broader struggles against neoliberal globalization and for radical democracy. In order to critically assess the efficacy of the WSF’s organizational ethos of diversity and decentralization as well as the counter-proposals to fix or even to nix it completely, I investigate its role in facilitating bridge-building among those already mobilizing against neoliberalism as well as with new or re-emerging actors opposed to the US-led wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. I will further examine efforts beyond the

social forum milieus to forge alliances with those most negatively impacted by, and most militantly resisting, neoliberalism and neo-imperialism.

Below I will first demonstrate how bounded diversity and decentralization are both prioritized and interlinked within the WSF Charter of Principles—its sole consensus statement to which all participants must adhere—and further, how these two principles have served as the main impetus for reforming the Forum’s design and function. Next I address whether and to what extent this dual formula of ‘bounded diversity+decentralization’ has fostered the creation and mixing of movements at the transnational level of contention. This is accomplished by analyzing the emergence of a global anti-war movement (GAWM) within the WSF spaces. What is shown is that the Forum’s decentralized and diverse nature has in fact provided a hospitable environment for ‘movement crossovers’ (Reese et al., forthcoming), or activists involved in more than one movement to rapidly shift their priorities, resources, frames, claims, tactics, campaign strategies, and coalitions in response to the emergent threat of war. This lends support to those who advocate maintaining the WSF as an open and flexible space of coalescence among diverse actors who support non-violent and democratic principles.

Finally, I take on the more polemical and potentially damning critique of scholar-activist Walden Bello (2007) as to whether or to what extent the WSF *inhibits* alliance-building with the most decisive anti-neoliberal and anti-imperial forces of our times and thereby actually *impedes* the global struggle. Here I examine the two most ambitious civil society initiatives organized outside the forum spaces and strictures attempting to bridge this gap, those of the Beirut and Cairo anti-war conferences.

What I conclude from this brief comparison is that Bello’s concerns, while warranted, should not be addressed via a radical restructuring of the Forum, much less its abandonment in favor of other spaces and structures. The polarization and power imbalances exacerbated in the Middle Eastern initiatives rather suggest that the proscriptions set out in the WSF Charter aimed at preserving and promoting diversity within the social forum milieus, far from having outlived their utility, should be maintained. These entail defining the WSF as a *non-partisan, non-deliberative, non-hierarchical, and non-violent space*, and thus barring political parties, groups involved in armed struggle, and decision-making or agenda-setting procedures on behalf of the Forum as a collective actor. For it is these key limitations placed on diversity—that is, its *bounded diversity*—that are arguably the best means by which to support nascent, democratic, and non-violent movements struggling to survive and take root in the Arab world and elsewhere. In contrast to those advocating radical reform or abolition, it is rather by deepening the twin commitments to decentralization and diversity—as well as by retaining limits on the plurality of actors and actions allowed within the space—that the Forum’s role of incubator and articulator of diverse struggles and ‘worlds in the making’ will be improved. I conclude by offering some preliminary suggestions as to how to move forward, reflecting on the relative success of the articulation of global anti-war activism with other movements within the WSF and drawing lessons from experiences outside the Forum spaces.

Diversity and Decentralization Prioritized and Interlinked within the WSF

As a collective utopian project of the contemporary left, the WSF is *prefigurative* in nature (Juris, 2005; Polletta, 1999; Smith et al., 2008). Central to this prefiguration and enshrined in its Charter of Principles is a commitment to diversity and to decentralized forms of social organization. The Charter’s expressed desire to maximize diversity has largely been realized in its practice. For example, while the first WSF held in Porto Alegre, Brazil, in January 2001

was organized by a coalition of 12 NGOs and social movements from South America and Europe and attracted 15,000 people, participation grew tenfold to 150,000 in 2005 and was overseen by the new WSF International Council drawn from over a hundred NGOs, networks, social movements, and campaigns from around the world. Equally important are the macro-regional, national, and local forums which have proliferated across Europe, the Americas, the Mediterranean, Asia, and Africa, coordinated by dozens of mobilization committees.

Turning to the breadth of issues raised within the WSF milieu, themes include democratic sustainable development, principles and values, human rights, diversity and equality, media, culture and counter-hegemony, political power, civil society and democracy, democratic world order, the fight against militarization, promoting peace, and opposing war. And reflecting the diversity of leftist activism today, the solutions advocated by its participants are equally broad-ranging, from reversing internationalization processes by strengthening local and/or state governance, to reforming neoliberalism and global institutions, to dismantling existing structures and constructing a post-capitalist, post-state world order.

Undergirding this diversity is the WSF's unique and evolving methodology as an open, ideally horizontal, prefigurative network of semi-autonomous spaces articulated from the local to the global level, and thus as distinct from, and more basic than, a social movement organization or political party (Fisher and Ponniah, 2003; Juris, 2005; Reitan, 2007a; Sen et al., 2003; Smith et al., 2008; Whitaker, 2007). But importantly, and somewhat paradoxically, in order to preserve the diverse and decentralized nature of the WSF as a space, its founders placed limitations within the Charter proscribing certain actions and actors. These include prohibitions against the Forum becoming a 'body representing world civil society' (Principle 5) wherein actors debate and take decisions on behalf of the WSF or all of its participants (Principle 6). Further, in order to preserve itself as a 'plural, diversified, non-confessional, non-governmental and non-party context' (Principle 8), the Charter bars political parties and restricts the involvement of elected officials to those invited by civil society participants and who support the Forum's principles. Finally, it takes a strong stance in support of non-violent resistance (Principle 9), and bars participation by armed groups (Principle 13).

As seen above, diversity and decentralization are cornerstones of the WSF Charter and serve as prefigurative ideals for its practice. It is not surprising then that critiques and calls for reform have centered on these rules and practices for maximizing—while simultaneously safeguarding—horizontality and plurality within the Forum. The WSF process has thus been one of incessant self-critique, heated debate, and dynamic reform. Throughout, its organizing committees and International Council have proved remarkably adept at protecting the space from encroachment from the 'right' by hierarchical movement organizations and political parties wishing to steer or remake it in their own image (Reitan, 2007a; Smith et al., 2008; Whitaker, 2007). Yet they have also answered constructive critiques from the 'left' with experimental attempts to improve the Forum's performance as a decentralized networked space for diverse movements to grow and mingle (Santos, 2008; Whitaker, 2007).

Toward these ends, its organizers have broadened the facilitation of the WSF to include the International Council, and then moved away from panels and themes planned by the Brazilian committee and International Council toward completely self-organized events by participants themselves. They have introduced the 'mural of proposals for action' and 'forums on struggles, alternatives and actions' on the last day of the WSF to encourage new initiatives and greater global collaboration within and across themes. Recently they have undertaken a collective, participatory, and critical assessment of the Forum's role in supporting mobilization worldwide that culminated in an open discussion at the IC meeting in Abuja in spring 2008. Finally, setting

as one of their core goals the multiplication of social forums into new geographical regions, issues, and levels of society, they organized a polycentric Forum in 2006 and a decentralized Forum in 2008 and have encouraged national and local forums throughout.

Anti-War Movement Emerges within WSF from Anti-Neoliberal Crossovers and Miscibility

The movement that emerged in response to the US invasions and occupations of Afghanistan and Iraq has been comprised of thousands of groups mobilizing tens of millions on all continents in some of the largest national demonstrations ever recorded, including the global day of action staged on 15 February 2003, and out of which the *New York Times* hailed the birth of a new 'superpower . . . [of] . . . world public opinion . . . eyeball to eyeball' with the Bush administration (Tyler, 2003). More sustained challenges to US global military and economic hegemony and efforts to construct a more peaceful, just, and multi-polar world have also been launched: the Occupation Watch Center providing first-hand, critical information of events on the ground; the World Tribunal on Iraq investigating war crimes by US leaders and allies; a reinvigorated campaign against foreign bases; a campaign for disarmament; and caravans, fact-finding missions and human shields to Iraq as well as civilian missions to the Israeli-occupied Palestinian territories.

What role have the world and regional social forums played in supporting this post-9/11 anti-war movement and in facilitating its articulation, or *miscibility*,² with extant movements, especially those opposing neoliberalism? A tremendous number and variety of activists are involved in world, regional, national, local, and thematic forums and serve as '*movement crossovers*' (Reese et al., forthcoming), who are involved in multi-issue organizations and movements and thus build bridges with the GAWM. In the interest of brevity, I will here spotlight the key crossover role of Focus on the Global South (FGS) and its director Walden Bello within major international meetings, protest events, and campaigns which they have helped to facilitate at the world and regional forums. FGS is an illustrative example because of its strategic-embeddedness in multiple movements, federations, and networks comprising not only the GAWM but also those constituting the alter- (or anti-neoliberal) globalization movement such as Our World is Not for Sale (OWINFS). As a Southern-based organization with a global agenda, it also holds a unique geographical bridging position between anti-neoliberal and anti-war groups in the Global North and those of Asia and the Middle East. And Bello particularly has been able to act as a pivotal crossover due to his extensive global contacts from prior participation with pro-democracy groups in the Philippines, 1960s' US activists from his student years, and transnational NGOs such as Food First, Oxfam, and Greenpeace (see Reitan, 2007a).

FGS and their OWINFS network partners were therefore well-suited to comprehend and then reorient to shifts in global opportunities and threats presented in the wake of the US's response to the 9/11 attacks. In this climate FGS emerged as a key alter-globalization movement—GAWM bridge-builder within the WSF and European Social Forum (ESF), as evidenced in the many seminars, workshops, plenaries, tribunals, 'terrain' spaces, anti-war and ESF Preparatory Assemblies, and WSF International Council and steering group meetings in which they and their partners have participated. The looming war galvanized preparations for the first ESF in Florence by European NGOs and social movements. While some of these relationships stretched back for decades, the most immediate predecessors were the planning group for the protests against the G8 talks in Genoa in July 2001 and the 'Other Davos' meeting held in

1999, which was a precursor to the first WSF (Neale, 2002). This ESF organizing committee acted as movement crossovers by prioritizing the war theme in Forum seminars as well as staging the first mass demonstration in Europe of up to one million on the closing day. It also served this role by gathering several hundred representatives of mostly European organizations into the first European Social Movements Assembly (SMA) the next morning. There they publicly set 15 February as the first global day of mobilization against war, a call that was echoed at the WSF in January 2003 (Reitan, 2002).

Likewise, FGS and its OWINFS partners have utilized the world and regional forums in ways that realize the WSF Charter's first stated goal, that of incubating new movements: They have held numerous transnational meetings bringing formerly unconnected actors together to share information and discuss issues toward developing a common anti-neoliberal critique, concrete campaigns, and a coordination framework. Equally important, with regard to the WSF's second goal of articulating social movements, FGS and OWINFS have used the forum spaces to encounter others beyond their main network and areas of concern who nevertheless perceive neoliberalism and war as common threats. For example, at the first ESF, Bello shared a platform in a packed meeting hall with activists from the Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan, the newly formed Asian Social Forum, and others from Indonesia, East Timor, and Russia in a critical dialogue on war in Asia (Reitan, 2002). This participation, as well as FGS's presence at all subsequent European forums, has facilitated movement crossovers among issues and bridged Asian and European activist communities.

This Asia-based networking within the Forums that seeks to bridge the alter-globalization movement and the GAWM has continued over the years. In preparation for both the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation meetings in Korea and the Hong Kong WTO ministerial in 2005, for example, OWINFS member Korean People's Action initiated an Asian Peoples' and Social Movements Assembly against War and Neoliberal Globalization to be held at the fifth WSF in Porto Alegre. Endorsed by FGS and numerous trade unions, peasants' groups, women's organizations, and peace and justice groups from around the region, the assembly sought not only to mobilize for the upcoming events, but also to unite and coordinate Asian-wide struggles and strengthen regional solidarity so as to contribute to the broader transnational resistance against neoliberalism and war (KOPA, 2005).

Another mass meeting held consistently within both the world and regional forums which promotes crossovers is the Global Assembly of the Anti-War Movement (hereafter, the 'Global Assembly'). At the second 2003 ESF in Paris, for instance, in addition to large seminars and smaller workshops focusing on war, neo-imperialism, and military bases, a couple hundred activists met for the Global Assembly. There they discussed the date of 20 March 2004 as the next transnational day of action, which was preferred by US activists and was eventually agreed to at the closing Social Movements' Assembly (Reitan, 2003). That same year at the WSF in Mumbai, FGS helped to convene another such Assembly, which they estimated to be the largest and most diverse transnational meeting of peace movements (FGS, 2004b). And at the 2007 WSF in Nairobi, the Global Assembly was again convened in addition to a number of self-organized anti-war workshops and seminars, while 'Peace and War' was one of 21 'Forums on struggles, alternatives and actions' organized by WSF facilitators (Reitan, 2007b). The breadth of signatories to these Assembly declarations and others like them evidences considerable movement bridging: Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development, the Brazilian trade union CUT, the Continental Campaign Against FTAA, Corpwatch, Canadian Polaris Institute, Freedom from Debt Coalition, Jubilee South, Korean Confederation of Trade Unions and Korean People's Action, and the NGO Federation of Nepal.

Yet transnational peace coordination has gone beyond meetings and assemblies aimed at planning mass demonstrations, and the social forums have provided a key site of innovation for these more sustained initiatives and campaigns. These include a network against foreign military bases and civil society tribunals exposing and condemning recent war crimes. At the fourth WSF in Mumbai, over a hundred activists convened several workshops toward building an International Network for the Abolition of Foreign Military Bases—or No Bases Network for short—which was eventually established in March 2007 (Narváez, 2007; No Bases, n.d). Also in Mumbai, the newly launched World Tribunal on Iraq (WTI) held its first of several international public hearings (Sokmen, 2008; WTI, 2005).

Perhaps the most propitious methodological *and* spatial innovation of the WSF to enhance alter-globalization and anti-war articulation was staged just prior to and during the WSF 2005. Methodologically, six months before the Forum, the International Council began a consultative process to gauge the themes of most concern to social movements, which in the end garnered responses from over 1,800 organizations mainly via the internet. This networked, participatory consultation method prefigured the spatial innovation that was realized in Porto Alegre: 11 themes were identified by WSF coordinators as most popular, and some 2,500 workshops, panels, and seminars were organized around them. But further, workshops with complementary themes were clustered along the Guaíba river. 'Peace, demilitarization and the struggle against war, free trade and debt' were grouped together to enhance movement crossovers and miscibility (Smythe, 2008).

As this consultative process launched by the International Council demonstrates, movement crossovers are also fostered between the regional and world forum events at the Council's meetings and at European Preparatory Assemblies. FGS is one of several OWINFS members on the International Council, which has proven to be a space for diverse groups to institutionalize and diffuse the WSF as a permanent global process as well as to dialogue, debate, and foster solidarity and miscibility toward coordinating action. Likewise, at the European Preparatory Assemblies in Paris on 19–20 December 2004, for example, regional anti-war activists met with representatives from Asia and the Americas to set a third global day of action marking the second anniversary of the Iraq invasion the following March (Constantinou, 2004; Nesbitt, 2005). And in tandem with the European meeting, 400 Indians representing a broad swath of civil organizations were joined in Hyderabad by 20 international activists for a meeting aimed at consolidating the nationwide movement and strengthening ties to the GAWM. There they also pledged to mobilize in March 2005 (Hyderabad, 2004; FGS, 2004b). This call was reiterated within the Global Assembly in late January in Porto Alegre at the WSF.

As final evidence of the tremendous movement crossovers and miscibility within the Forum spaces vis-à-vis the GAWM, since late summer 2004, FGS has been part of a fluid steering group to better coordinate anti-war activity. This group draws together around two dozen representatives from the largest anti-war coalitions and anti-neoliberal networks worldwide and often meets at the social forums (FGS, 2004b). It has included newly formed national and regional anti-war coalitions, namely Stop the War Coalitions from the UK and Greece, South Africa's Anti-War Coalition, the Asian Peace Alliance, Japan's Peace Boat, the Mexican Serapaz, India's Coalition for Nuclear Disarmament and Peace, and the UK's Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament. Yet indicative of the considerable movement articulation between traditional and newly formed peace groups and existing anti-neoliberal networks, also represented have been ATTAC Japan, San Francisco's Global Exchange, the South American Hemispheric Social Alliance, Italian Movements of the ESF, Red Mexicana de Acción frente al Libre

Comercio, Brazil's Movimento dos Sem Terra and the global Via Campesina it helped establish, and the World March of Women.

Fix or Nix the WSF? Lessons from the Beirut and Cairo Anti-War Conferences

The above evidence suggests that the decentralized design of the WSF, along with the diversity of actors and issues it attracts, has in fact facilitated rapid and widespread reorientation and cross-over activity on the part of alter-globalization and anti-war bridge-builders like FGS, in order to respond to the emergent threat of war and to link this concern to pre-existing struggles against neoliberalism. This implies that safeguarding the WSF as an open and flexible space without attempting to prioritize issues or set a collective agenda may in fact be the most efficacious way of facilitating dynamic movement emergence and coalescence. But before we draw this conclusion with greater certainty, we must first address the more existential critique that Bello (2007, 2008) has raised, which sparked considerable debate. This calls into question whether the WSF actually impedes the global struggle against neoliberalism and imperialism by stifling alliances with the most decisive anti-hegemonic forces on the ground, and thus querying whether the Forum should be discarded altogether. Bello's concern arises from the fact that while movement crossovers had considerable success in linking East Asia, Europe and the Americas within an emergent anti-war movement embedded within the alter-globalization movement and WSF, there was a relative absence of both coordination partners and mass mobilization in Arab countries, the very people most threatened by, and actively resisting, the US wars. Fearing that opportunities were being lost, the WSF's organizational rules and model were seen as partially to blame.

These concerns are justified. When compared with other regions of the globe, Arab participation on the WSF's International Council, for example, is miniscule. Out of over 150 organizations, only 6 represent Arab or other Muslim groups.³ Attendance at the WSF and other regional forums on the part of Middle Eastern activists has also remained comparatively low, and the social forum has been experimented with less frequently in these countries than their regional neighbors. While small forums have been convened in Morocco, Palestine, Tunisia, Egypt, and the Magreb, their organizers—mostly European-funded development and human rights NGOs—acknowledge the failure to bridge to grassroots movements who perceive the process as elite-driven. Forum supporters meeting to discuss its future in their region lamented that, with the exception of Palestinian civil society, Arab participation continues to be relatively lacking, poorly coordinated among regional organizations, and without a sense of ownership in the overall process (Arab NGO Network, n.d.; Stop the Wall, 2008).

In the face of these challenges, two ambitious meetings held in Beirut and Cairo have attempted to bridge the geographic, ideological, and organizational gulfs that lie between those organizing against war within the WSF and groups most adversely impacted by or violently opposed to the occupations, the latter characterized by pan-Islamism, Marxist-Leninism, and militant anti-imperialism. Scrutinizing these initiatives will help us to answer, first, whether anti-neoliberal and anti-imperial struggles would be better served if the WSF were to slacken its commitments to decentralization and diversity by abandoning its prohibitions on specific actors and actions. Namely, this would entail allowing Forum participants to take collective decisions and to set a common agenda, as well as permitting militant anti-imperial groups and the political parties that support them to participate fully. Second, examining the Beirut and Cairo meetings helps us assess the more extreme critique of whether the Forum has outlived its utility, become a burden to the movements, and thus should be abandoned and replaced wholesale.

The Beirut International Strategy Meeting of Anti-War and Anti-Globalization Movements was held on 17–19 September 2004. It followed from discussions in the Global Assembly held at the Mumbai WSF in 2004. Consistent with its role within the Forum, FGS was a key coordinator of the Beirut meeting, along with the French-based Civilian Campaign for Protection of Palestinian People. Unburdened by the WSF's prohibitions against collective decision-making, and justifiably concerned by the lack of Arab activists to be found within its spaces, the organizers were keen to set a more ambitious goal in Beirut: Not only to strengthen ties with Middle Eastern and Arab activists, but also to articulate a strategic plan of action to counter imperialism, globalization, and US and Israeli occupations (FGS, 2004a; ISP, 2004). FGS put a lot of effort into this event, including attempts to visit Baghdad in spring 2004 in order to identify civil society groups to invite to Lebanon, a trip that had to be cancelled at the last minute when fighting broke out in Falluja and elsewhere (Bello, 2008).

Despite these initial setbacks, FGS and their partners were nevertheless successful in gathering hundreds of activists from 54 countries, the majority being Lebanese, Palestinians, Iraqis, Greeks, Egyptians, and Jordanians. Others came from India, the Philippines, Japan, Turkey, Canada, and the US, the latter represented by United for Peace and Justice coalition members including American Friends Service Committee, Global Exchange's anti-war campaign Code Pink, and Corpwatch. This shows that the meeting did go some way toward achieving its first goal of fostering contacts and greater understanding between Middle Eastern activists and those from outside the region, in addition to promoting greater transnational mixing among anti-war and anti-neoliberal activism.

Yet the second objective proved largely elusive. The discussions were fraught with tensions which precluded those present from agreeing on how to moving forward (Bello, 2008; ISP, 2004). The sources of these conflicts were manifold, and speak directly to whether the social forum should be fixed or nixed. Within the local Lebanese context, grassroots groups and NGOs expressed concerns akin to those that gave rise to the WSF Charter barring political parties and armed groups from participating in the Forum space: By allowing as sponsors two communist and one Islamist party which support armed resistance—namely Hezbollah, the Lebanese Communist Party, and the Socialist Party—other civil society actors felt that this closed the space in which a more progressive kind of politics and broader political analysis could be articulated. Canadian activists who were present recalled this critique as, 'those involved in frontline struggles for the basic rights of refugees, women, migrant workers, detainees and queers in the Middle East expressed their frustration at having been told, for years, that their struggles must take second place to the movement against US imperialism and Israel' (ISP, 2004). This meeting's focus and design seemed again to reinforce their lower-ranked status in the hierarchy of issues and actors.

Similarly, the few African delegates present questioned why the Middle Eastern wars and occupations were prioritized, while their own resource, proxy, and inter-ethnic conflicts that pervade much of the continent garner little solidarity or attention from the global anti-war, anti-imperial, and anti-neoliberal movements worldwide. Unsurprisingly, it was the traditional Marxist parties of Lebanon and the UK's Socialist Workers' Party (SWP) who countered these critiques with the rationale that, since we cannot fight on all fronts nor for all issues simultaneously, we must first strategically unite against the capitalist and imperialist enemy in the most important regional conflicts where they are embroiled (ISP, 2004).

This argument, long advanced by traditional Marxist parties, is linked to another tension that surfaced in Beirut, which Bello (2008) found to be even more polarizing. It arose among Iraqi exiles and internal refugees and other European anti-imperialist groups who have Iraqi partners,

and was characterized by disagreements over the duties of international solidarity and the nature of the Iraqi resistance. Here, Bello seems to have gone through a learning process as a consequence. In Lebanon, he was responsible for initiating a discussion on alliance-formation with a talk entitled 'Beirut 2004: A Milestone in the Global Struggle against Injustice and War'. In this speech he chastised the global anti-war and alter-globalization movements for conditioning their solidarity on whether Arab resistance aligned with the values and tactics of a largely secular and non-violent Global North (and the WSF Charter). Carrying an embrace of 'diversity of tactics' to its logical extreme, Bello advocated for non-interference and unconditional solidarity with the actually existing forms of local resistance against US occupation (ISP, 2004).

Sharp criticism of Bello's *laissez-faire* stance came from close quarters: Echoing the very same debates out of which has crystallized the commitment to a social forum milieu characterized as non-partisan and non-violent, a number of local voices were raised in protest. Such a *carte blanche* position as Bello's, they countered, actually empowers nationalists, Islamists, and armed forms of resistance, to the detriment of more precarious, democratic, civil and political groups that are trying to take root in Iraq, Afghanistan, Palestine, and Lebanon. The critics instead called upon GAWM and alter-globalization activists to form alliances consistent with their own ideological principles and values of democratic accountability, justice, equality, human dignity, the value of life, and true self-determination by the people, and not with whoever happens to be the strongest faction (ISP, 2004).

According to Bello (2007), the Beirut meeting was the last major initiative concerning Iraq in which East Asian-based groups like his own were to play a leadership role. He and his colleagues nevertheless have continually tried to identify and initiate relationships with Iraqi civil society groups who could potentially bridge the Shi'a–Sunni schism and who have local credibility as well as global acceptability. Their post-Beirut efforts have yet to bear fruit, however. FGS members have also continued to attend anti-war gatherings in the US, Europe, and the Middle East, be they within or beyond the strictures of the WSF. A second such initiative that Bello has been only minimally involved with but nonetheless supportive of, and which is rather tenuously related to the social forum process, are the Cairo Anti-War Conferences.⁴ These meetings embody a more militant anti-imperialism and hierarchical structure, and thus provide a more extreme counter-example to the WSF's decentralized and pro-diversity model. They therefore are a clearer test case for whether the Forum should be fixed or nixed.

The driving force in the Global North behind the Cairo conferences has been the SWP, who also organize the Stop the War UK coalition, and who have been heavily engaged with the WSF and ESF processes. Their involvement in each is seen as problematic by many within the broader alter-globalization and anti-war movements (Bello, 2008; Juris, 2005; Reitan, 2004), stemming from what their critics call their commandist logic and organizational model. Thus, the SWP, who prefer to operate within hierarchical (albeit ostensibly democratic) structures and advocate armed resistance and ultimately revolution, have established the most openly militant anti-war meeting space outside the WSF to date, that of the Cairo Anti-war Conferences. Held annually since December 2002, the aim is much like that in Beirut: to bridge *geographical, issue-related, and ideological* gaps among activists. In order to assess the overall success of the Cairo conferences, each kind of bridging will be briefly addressed below.

With respect to geographical bridging, the Cairo process has been the most sustained effort to establish a place where political parties and armed resistance groups from the Middle East opposed to US-led war and neoliberal globalization and in support of democratization can meet each other and their international counterparts. John Rees of the SWP and Stop the War, who joined Elias Rashmawi of the US's Workers World Party and Act Now to Stop

War and End Racism (ANSWER) in launching an International Campaign against US Aggression on Iraq at the second Cairo conference, observed:

Where else can you sit down in a single evening and listen to senior people from Hamas, Hizbullah, the Muslim Brotherhood, people from the revolutionary left and people from the anti-war movement around the globe? There is no other place. So whatever people's criticism might be, ... it's ... the best conference there is in the Middle East on this question. I also think it has helped in opening up some political space for the democracy movement in Egypt. These are not insignificant achievements. (Rees quoted in Howeidy, 2007, n.p.)

The Cairo meetings have attracted a few hundred delegates annually, including communists and anti-imperialists from Europe and the Americas, UN representatives, anti-colonial heroes, and major opposition parties from across the Arab world. An international steering committee was established after the first conference aimed at implementing the groups' decisions and maintaining coordination among anti-war groups worldwide. The UK's SWP/ Stop the War, along with their allies in the umbrella Respect Party, and joined recently by the more radical Scottish Palestinian Support Committee, have played lead roles in this North-South coordination. This coalition hosted a number of their Middle Eastern comrades in London for the World Against War conference in early December 2007, issued the annual call for and then coordinated demonstrations in mid-March 2008, and turned up in force at the sixth Cairo conference that same month, bringing the largest Northern contingent of some 30 people (First Cairo Declaration, 2002; Wight, 2008). On the ground, the Cairo Conference is funded by Egyptians with business interests in Iraq and hosted at the Egyptian journalists' union offices by an umbrella group called the Egyptian Popular Campaign to Confront US Aggression. The latter encompasses an array of ideologies: It is led by Egypt's banned Muslim Brotherhood party and includes other Islamists, Marxists, Nasserists, trade and professional unionists, popular committees, and researchers (Crooke, 2003).

With respect to issue-bridging, the conference's themes have radicalized as the wars, occupations, and resistance have intensified. Yet throughout, its coordinators have maintained the twin targets of war and globalization in order to promote issue miscibility. Before the onset of the Iraqi invasion, the conference was framed in terms of being 'against U.S. hegemony and war on Iraq and in solidarity with Palestine'. Subsequent conferences have reflected the rising power of Palestine's Hamas and Lebanon's Hezbollah, casting the meeting as an 'International Campaign against US and Zionist Occupation'. And as the Iraqi fighters grew stronger, the group morphed into the 'Popular Campaign for the Support of Resistance in Palestine and Iraq and Against Globalization' wherein they express solidarity for Hamas, Hezbollah and the 'legitimate Iraqi resistance' (First Cairo Declaration, 2002; Second Cairo Declaration, 2003; Final Declaration of the Cairo Conference, 2006).

This diversity of actors drawn largely from the Middle East suggests that the Cairo initiative has been perhaps the most successful, sustained effort at opening a space for those most adversely impacted by war and occupation in the region itself. These organizational and outreach efforts should be acknowledged, closely studied, and selectively built upon by anyone who similarly wishes to forge alliances within the region. But that being said, the central role played by Islamist and communist anti-imperialist parties who openly support or participate in armed struggle has meant that most of the individuals and groups participating in the WSF—as well as many local and regional activists with critical concerns on par with those expressed in Beirut—have steered clear of Cairo. Middle Eastern Studies scholar Joel Beinin (2008) at the American University in Cairo, for example, notes that many local progressives have avoided

the conference so as not to be associated with the Muslim Brotherhood, out of rejection of the single-minded focus on 'resistance' against Zionism and imperialism that supports all forms of armed struggle and tolerates anti-Semitism, or due to the widespread belief that the first conference was financed by Saddam Hussein. Other European activists have criticized the heavy presence and attempts to control the meeting by the SWP/ Stop the War Coalition (Wight, 2008). While still others who did attend have bristled at the ideological framing and strategic vision that they feel is anathema to the prefigurative ethos of the broader alter-globalization and anti-war movements and the WSF. The crimes of the former Iraqi regime and its lack of democracy, one observer noted, are blamed on US sanctions, while local business interests and Arab populism are championed (Crooke, 2003).

On balance, what this evidence suggests is that the Cairo anti-war conferences have provided a platform for political parties of all kinds opposed to US dominance to meet, discuss, and issue vitriolic statements calling for armed resistance; what they have been much less successful at doing is attracting a broad base of allies opposed to economic and military hegemony, much less providing a space for grassroots democratic and progressive movements of all kinds to meet one another and build toward common action.

Concluding Reflections on the Efficacy of Bounded Diversity + Decentralization

The polarization and power imbalances exacerbated in Beirut and especially the Cairo initiatives suggest that, far from having outlived their utility, the proscriptions laid down in the WSF Charter aimed at preserving and promoting broad diversity within the social forum milieu ought to be maintained. Specifically, these prohibitions protect the WSF as a non-partisan, non-deliberative, non-hierarchical, and non-violent space, and thus prohibit political parties, armed resistance groups, and decision-making or agenda-setting on behalf of the Forum as a collective whole. For it is these very constraints placed on diversity that hold the most promise of fostering democratic and non-violent struggles around the world, be they longstanding or emergent.

This is not to say that reforms should not be pursued. To the contrary, the many changes made to the social forum process noted earlier highlight how its coordinators and active participants continue to improve upon its functioning. These changes have been in response to the widely felt and justified need among Forum participants to enhance the quantity and quality of opportunities for mutual encounter, debate, and dialogue among their diverse movements. Finding ways to foster these nascent efforts toward intercultural and inter-political understanding is the necessary groundwork if more coherent strategies and powerful movements, drawing on shared knowledge and repertoires of action, are to be articulated (Santos, 2008).

Furthermore, as the Forum strives to achieve greater inclusion of marginalized and under-represented groups—grassroots Arab and Muslim activists chief among them—several lessons can be gleaned from the Beirut and Cairo initiatives. While an appropriate place for discussion and potential adaptation of these lessons is within the WSF's expansion commission, these lessons arguably apply more broadly to any transnational civil society organization interested in bridging to Arab or other under-represented regions and actors.⁵ First, the outreach, networking, and rapport-building that transnational movement crossovers like FGS, and to some extent the SWP, have done throughout the Middle East should be tapped into and supported by the WSF and regional social forum coordinators. This is an important step toward developing a more comprehensive and proactive policy in the region to foster progressive local movements and encourage their articulation with extant networks organizing within the Forum spaces. Other steps

include foundation and government grants as well as solidarity funds raised by the Northern-based groups on the WSF International Council being more assertively targeted toward ensuring Arab participation in the world and regional forums and building local, national, and regional forums. WSF coordinators, with the help of International Council members like FGS and others, should also make a more concerted effort to identify and invite organizations from the region to join the Council.

Yet if we are to remain true to the WSF's organizational ethos of bounded diversity plus decentralization, the WSF expansion commission and International Council should not be seen as primarily responsible for bringing the WSF to the Arab region, or elsewhere. This article has shown that it is the very decentralized structure of the WSF that promotes and indeed relies upon autonomous initiatives by transnational crossover groups such as FGS and individuals like Bello, and more importantly by activists indigenous to the region itself. They provide the necessary partners for and critical feedback to the WSF as to how it can better serve the actually existing movements and better link them with others. While Bello's critique was originally framed as an either/or choice between the WSF and 'other', in practice, criticisms such as his have fostered a creative tension that pushes the WSF forward. This 'call and response' dynamic is viewed as positive and necessary by many participants.

Each of these facts points to the real genius of the WSF methodology, and add further evidence for why it should be supported and maintained. The challenge continues to be ensuring that key crossovers and bridge-builders like Bello work within the Forum's rather broad and amorphous framework in order to generate new ideas and thinking about how to organize globally against all forces of oppression. Furthermore, finding more effective ways of translating the wealth of these autonomous experiments occurring outside the Forum *into* its process is crucial if we are to avoid frustrations leading to groups leaving the WSF altogether. The coordination against war and imperialism is a fascinating and crucial study-in-progress of this dynamic.

This work has shown that future innovations must spring from and enhance the organizational ethos of the Forum space. Conversely, claims that, in the name of efficiency, appeal for common priorities and positions to be set among all those who participate may in fact hinder the WSF's dynamic efficacy, and should thus be guarded against. We can therefore conclude that, rather than it being radically fixed or entirely nixed, those involved in the WSF should deepen the twin commitments to decentralization and bounded diversity—and this means retaining limits on the plurality of actors and actions allowed within. Evidence from the global anti-war movement suggests that this is the best way to protect the WSF so that it may continue to serve as an incubator and articulator of diverse, progressive struggles at this critical historical juncture of multiple, mounting, and overlapping global crises.

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Notes

- 1 For a full account of recent debates, see World Social Forum (2008) and CADTM (2008).
- 2 Vasi (2006) defines movement miscibility as a process in which trigger events combine with internet technology to create simultaneous mobilizations among movements with compatible ideologies which, to varying degrees and lengths of time, dissolve into one other.

- 3 These are the Arab NGO Network for Development, All Arab Peasants and Agricultural Co-operatives Union, General Union of Oil Employees in Southern Iraq, Ittijah (Union of Arab [Palestinian] Community Based Organizations), Palestinian Grassroots Anti-Apartheid Wall Campaign, and the Palestinian NGO Network.
- 4 This despite the fact that the Cairo anti-war conveners have since 2005 cast this meeting as part of a larger 'Cairo social forum'. See Riddell (2007).
- 5 The expansion commission was established by the WSF international council in 2003 and is organized into regional working groups, one of them for Arab countries. Other commissions include finance, strategy, content and methodology, and communications.

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