

Discussion: Initiating a new phase of alterglobalization

Wednesday 18 September 2019, by [MASSIAH Gustave](#) (Date first published: 17 September 2019).

Farewell to the World Social Forum (WSF)? In reference to the Great Transition Network (GTN) [1] Discussion.

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Looking Back

The definition we have of alterglobalism is that of a historical emancipation movement that extends and renews previous historical movements; the workers' movement, the peasants' movement, the decolonization movement, the women rights' movement, and others.

This movement began in the late 1970s with a new phase of capitalist globalization, that of neoliberalism and financialization. It is the anti-systemic movement of this phase. The movement already went through several phases: initially, against the imposition of structural adjustment plans and the debt crisis; then, the phase of challenging international institutional system based on global mobilizations against the G7 and G20, the IMF, the World Bank, and the WTO; and then the third phase, which began in 2000, is that of the World Social Forums.

Alterglobalization is first confronted with the evolution of the international situation and that of capitalist globalization. The 2008 financial crisis showed the forms of exhaustion of neoliberalism and the fragility of financial capitalism. Ecological awareness, particularly awareness of climate issues and challenges, has shown the limits of capitalism and productivism. Post-crisis policies, debt and austerity plans have exacerbated inequalities and distrust towards politicians. From 2011 onwards, insurgencies broke out in dozens of countries; millions of people occupied the streets and public squares. One finds the same watchwords everywhere: the rejection of poverty and inequality, the rejection of discrimination, freedoms and the rejection of repression, the demand for democracy to be reinvented, and the need to address the ecological emergency. Everywhere new challenges arise, such as the need to combat corruption and reject the merger of the political and financial classes that cancels out the autonomy of politicians and leads to mistrust among peoples in relation to political authorities. These movements were not in contradiction with the World Social Forums, but they did not identify themselves in those forums.

From 2013 onwards, as the new movements continue, counter-revolutions began with the rise of

racist, xenophobic and security-based ideologies as well as the wave of decentralized wars. Neoliberalism is hardening its domination and strengthening its security-based character relying on repression and coups d'état. Reactionary governments have in charge in several countries. Social and citizen movements are in a defensive position. Social, democratic, political, ideological and cultural resistance is required.

At a Crossroads

We need to look back at the situation to appreciate the consequences of a period of counter-revolution. Several conservative counter-revolutions are under way: the neoliberal counter-revolution, the counter-revolution of the old and new dictatorships, the counter-revolution of evangelical conservatism, the counter-revolution of Islamist conservatism, and the counter-revolution of Hindu conservatism. Those counter-revolutions are a reminder of the fact that revolutionary periods are generally short and often followed by violent and much longer counter-revolutions. But counter-revolutions do not cancel out revolutions and the new world that is emerging continues to progress, and resurfaces, sometimes long after, in new forms.

The hardening of contradictions and social tensions explains the emergence of extreme forms of confrontation. By losing the alliance with the *middle classes and certain popular strata*, neoliberalism turns its back on a democratic, even though relative, option; neoliberalism engages in an "austeritarian" version, mixing austerity with authoritarianism and developing aggressive State-sponsored violence. We are witnessing a *relative impoverishment* linked to the rise of insecurity, which may explain the listening to nationalist and extremist discourses. But there is also another reason for the situation, which is the anguish associated with the emergence of a new world. This is what Trump in the United States, Bolsonaro in Brazil, Orban in Hungary, Modi in India, and Duterte in the Philippines represent in different forms...

What are the deep ruptures that are building the new world and prefiguring the contradictions of the future? We can identify five ongoing mutations, unfinished revolutions whose first upheavals we already perceive. The revolution in women's rights is challenging thousands of years of domination relations. The revolution in the rights of peoples, the second phase of decolonization, after the independence of Third World nations highlights the liberation of peoples and questions the multiple identities and the forms of the Nation-States. Ecological awareness is a philosophical revolution, one that is based on the idea of a finite time. Digital technology is renewing language and writing, and biotechnology is questioning the limits of the human body. Changes in the planet's population are underway; migration is one aspect of a global demographic revolution.

There are several upheavals in progress, unfinished and uncertain revolutions. There is no guarantee that they will not be quelled, diverted or exploited by other people to serve their own agendas. But there is no evidence to support this either. Revolutions are changing the world; they also bring hope and already mark the future and the present. For the time being, they are causing rejection and great violence.

The World Social Forum has not been absent from these new challenges, but it has not been able to bring them together. It initiated a strategic approach, at its climax, at the Belém Social Forum in 2009. The Forum had highlighted the articulation between resistance, the rejection of financialization and of the austerity drift, on the one hand, and the alternative on the other hand, the ecological, social and democratic transition. Nonetheless, the Forum did not propose any political translation to the challenges of this new period.

Looking Ahead

The World Social Forum (WSF) remains a meeting place for movements that recognize themselves in alterglobalism. The Forum is no longer the central place of the alternative but it participates in it. New movements have emerged and many movements have withdrawn and limited themselves to national spaces. The debate led by certain movements that would like to engage in a more offensive policy is legitimate. World Social Forums are very insufficient even though they are still necessary. For the moment, they are space where movements confront their strategy on an international scale and question the international dimension of their strategy. Alterglobalization was born from the convergence of social and citizen movements and of the international networks of movements. A new phase of the alterglobalization movement needs to be invented.

The alterglobalization movement emphasizes respect for the diversity of movements. This is what intersectionality means, which would not be limited to the relationships between classes, genders and origins. The evolution of the movements is also to be questioned. In the social forums, the debate has been initiated on the “*NGO-ization*” of movements and the differentiation from the mobilization movements. Considerable cultural changes are at work that will mark the alterglobalization movement. These are in particular the new generational forms of engagement and changes in the individual/collective relationship.

The alterglobalization movement reminds us that the transformation of each society cannot be considered if the world is not changed. The alterglobalization movement is based on international law built around respect for fundamental rights. The movement proposes, instead of a definition of development based on productivist growth and forms of domination, a strategy for an ecological, social, democratic, and geopolitical transition.

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

The proposed approach is to take as a starting point the strategy of social and citizens’ movements, to propose to all movements, and to international networks of movements, to redefine their strategy in relation to the changes and disruptions that characterize the current situation, and to highlight the international dimension of these strategies. This approach will launch the new phase of alterglobalization.

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P.S.

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Footnotes

- [1] Great Transition Network [gtnetwork](http://gtnetwork.org) greattransition.org