



October 2019

## The New Phase of Alter-Globalization

### Contribution to GTI Forum [Farewell to the World Social Forum?](#)

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#### Looking Back

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

Over these decades, alter-globalization confronted the evolution of international affairs and capitalist globalization. The 2008 financial crisis revealed the exhaustion of neoliberalism and the fragility of financial capitalism. Ecological awareness, particularly with regard to climate change, unmasked the limits of capitalism and productivism. Post-crisis policies, such as austerity plans, have exacerbated inequalities and fostered distrust of politicians. Starting in 2011, insurgencies broke out in dozens of countries as millions of people occupied the streets and public squares. The same watchwords were present everywhere: the rejection of poverty, inequality, discrimination, and repression, and the demand to reinvent democracy and take bold action to address the ecological crisis. Everywhere, new challenges arise, such as combatting corruption

and rejecting the political influence of the financial classes. Although these movements were not in contradiction with the World Social Forum, they did not identify with it.

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

## At a Crossroads

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

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

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

revolution is having far-reaching impacts: the revolution in digital technology is transforming language and writing, and that in biotechnology is extending the limits of the human body. The revolution in demographics is underway toward a larger, older, and more mobile population, with migration one manifestation.

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

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

## Looking Ahead

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

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

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

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

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

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## About the Author



Gustave Massiah is an engineer, economist, and former professor at the Ecole Nationale Supérieure d'Architecture de Paris la Villette. He was a founding member of CEDETIM (Centre d'études et d'initiatives de solidarité internationale), a global solidarity organization, and Secretary General of the International League for the Rights and Liberation of Peoples. He has been a prominent voice in the alter-globalization movement, serving as the president of CRID (Centre de recherche et d'information sur le développement) from 2000 to 2008 and vice president of ATTAC from 2001 to 2006. He is a founding member of the IPAM network (Initiatives for Another World) and is on the International Council of the World Social Forum. In 2011, he published *Une stratégie altermondialiste*.

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Cite as Gustave Massiah, "The New Phase of Alter-Globalization," contribution to GTI forum "Farewell to the World Social Forum?," *Great Transition Initiative* (October 2019), <https://greattransition.org/gti-forum/wsf-massiah>.

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