

Activist knowledges on the anti-globalization terrain: transnational feminisms at the World Social Forum

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Abstract

This article surveys and analyses feminist knowledges about the politics of global justice as they are being produced through engagement with the World Social Forum (WSF) process at the global level over a ten year period. Among these are alternative genealogies of the global justice movement, critical analyses of its gendered culture and hegemonic masculinities, feminist discourses of intersectionality and transversality, and tensions between gender justice and economic justice. The author argues for the distinctive character of feminist knowledges and their substantive contributions to the politics of global justice, while also recognizing their heterogeneity, contradictions and lacunae, and their relational character vis-à-vis other political currents on the terrain of global justice.

Introduction

This article aims to identify the distinct character and substance of feminist knowledge that is being produced and brought to bear on the anti-globalization terrain through sustained feminist engagement with the World Social Forum (WSF). The WSF is a worldwide process initiated in 2001 that regularly gathers diverse social movements opposed to neoliberal globalization in periodic social forum events in which the self-organizing efforts of the participating groups constitutes the programme of the events. Social forum events are marked by the embrace of pluralism and diversity, which is enacted and advanced through its methodology of open space. Social fora are not intended to produce unified declarations or actions by their participants. Rather, they enact a novel cultural politics fostering exchange across diverse identities and agendas on the anti-globalization terrain and incubating cross-movement collaboration at all scales of activism. The WSF process is globally uneven but is marked by its origins in Latin America and its political orientation toward the Global South. Social forum events at the regional and world levels regularly attract tens of thousands of participants.¹

Feminisms manifest themselves across the myriad issues and sectors apparent in any single forum event, appearing in many guises and languages, in regionally- and culturally-specific ways, and in a vast array of grassroots as well as institutionalized, localized as well as transnationalized, expressions.

¹ The WSF is an incredibly complex phenomenon that defies easy description or explanation. See my forthcoming *Edges of Global Justice: The World Social Forum and Its 'Others'* (Conway 2012) along with Santos (2006), Smith et al. (2008), and Sen et al (2004).

Feminists are located in virtually all the political currents present in the forum and in movements that are not generally identified as feminist. Although women and feminists have populated the WSF in great numbers, they have persistently struggled for voice and visibility. Women regularly comprise half or more of the participants in the WSF yet remain a small fraction of the speakers, leaders, and writers of the WSF. Although this problem has been more successfully confronted at the Mumbai (2004) and Nairobi (2007) fora, it continues to characterize the fora in Brazil (2001, '02, '03, '05, '09) which is the homeplace of the WSF.

Feminists have been more attuned than most to the power dynamics within the open space, to the persistence of social relations of domination and inequality within the forum which mirror those in the world beyond the forum. Feminists see the reproduction of patriarchal practices in the WSF, including violence against women, the marginalization of women as thinkers and knowers, and the dismissal of feminism, as an intellectual and political resource. This has prompted ongoing debates about the terms of feminist engagement with the WSF: whether to create their own autonomous spaces outside or within the WSF, and whether and how to intervene in and over the WSF itself as a whole, both through populating its events and contesting the governance bodies of the WSF as loci of power (Vargas 2003a; Alvarez et al. 2004; Conway 2007b; Vargas 2009).

Despite these myriad challenges, feminisms thoroughly saturate the WSF and many of its constituent movements, in addition to constituting their own distinctive networks. The study which follows focuses on self-identified transnational feminist networks which have a sustained presence and multi-faceted engagement in the WSF as sites for the production of feminist knowledge in the anti-globalization milieu. Focus on sustained feminist engagement in the WSF across place, scale and time has favoured attention to relatively robust transnational networks over small-scale, more localized expressions of women's and feminist agency which come and go in the WSF and are highly dependent on the local context. This article is focused particularly on sustained feminist engagement with the world-scale WSF process.

There is a plurality of such transnational feminisms active in the WSF, expressing distinct political histories, orientations and institutionalizations and representing distinct political projects and feminist visions of transformation. Despite their heterogeneity, I will argue that they are carriers of a collective body of knowledge, pluralistic but identifiably feminist, that they are bringing to bear on the anti-globalization milieu. These knowledges arise most immediately from their praxis on that terrain, but they also draw on larger and longer feminist movement histories. More than any other current of contemporary social and political thought, feminist thought is produced in relation to a complex world-wide movement, is constitutive of its praxis, and needs to be understood in that context. Furthermore, feminist knowledges are also produced in relation to wider social contexts and social forces, including in relation to other liberatory social movements. The contours of these relations

are important to understand in considering the character and substance of particular feminist knowledges, particularly in this historical moment of unprecedented contact and collaboration among diverse social movements on the anti-globalization terrain.

In this article, I introduce the major transnational feminist networks active at the WSF. While broadly politically convergent in terms of their interventions in and over the WSF, these feminisms also exhibit significant differences, notably around who is the proper subject of feminist politics, the status of place and the local scale in transnational feminism, and the privilege accorded to gender in feminist politics over other axes of social differentiation, inequality and oppression. Secondly, I will argue that, notwithstanding their somewhat diverging political discourses and priorities, these feminisms all reflect a historical transition underway in feminism as a global movement - away from the modes of policy advocacy associated with its interactions with the United Nations and associated processes and institutions towards a more activist and movement-building orientation marked by openness to an array of other movements on the anti-globalization terrain. Thirdly, I distil from the practices and discourses constituting this heterogeneous feminist field a bundle of knowledges distinctive to feminism which are now being brought to bear on the anti-globalization terrain. Although the reception of feminist knowledges is uneven across the diverse array of anti-globalization movements, there is also evidence to suggest that the WSF, its methodology and culture of politics, has been deeply influenced by the sustained engagement of these feminisms.

This study is part of a larger body of work on the WSF based on nearly ten years of field research at world-scale events, plus numerous regional, national, and local social fora in the Americas. My research has included observing these feminisms in action at the WSF, participating in their events, meetings and demonstrations, interviewing movement leaders, reading their organizational websites, reports, and newsletter, listening to speeches and reviewing the writings of their leading activist-intellectuals, and seeking to contextualize these discourses and practices both historically and geographically.

I am a long-time feminist and activist, with twenty years of experience in social movements in Canada and ten years of engagement with the World Social Forum process as both scholar and organizer. Compared to those in other contexts, social movements in Canada have had a long history of working together in coalitions. That collaborative experience has influenced the development of social movements, so that feminism has grown up inside the labour movement, indigenous issues are strongly present in environmental movements, and anti-racism has permeated many activisms, among other instances of cross-fertilization (Conway 2004: 99ff.). My understanding of social movements, of feminism in particular, of their mutual transformations under conditions of intense interaction, and of the possibilities and pitfalls of coalition politics has been deeply shaped by this history.

The anti-globalization terrain is a similar context of intense, indeed historically unprecedented, contact among diverse movements on a global scale. On this

terrain, the WSF is a particularly privileged site that allows for study of sustained interaction that is unfolding in a variety of modes and across a great panopoly of activist discourses. Although uneven, these processes of dialogue and collaboration are transforming subjectivities and producing new practices and knowledges which change conditions of possibility for broad-based social justice struggles. Through this study of the production of feminist knowledges and their contribution in the wider anti-globalization milieu, I seek to further our understanding of the transformations underway in social movements under these conditions.

As a scholar-activist at the WSF, I have been studying its new culture of politics and the relations among movements that it is facilitating. I have been particularly interested in feminism because I noticed early on, in both the anti-globalization mobilizations in the global North and in the WSF, the paradox of its simultaneous centrality and marginality in the evolving politics of global justice. Through subsequent accompaniment of particular feminist networks, I have studied feminist positionality in the process at the world level over the last ten years.

Transitions in transnational feminist politics

It is widely acknowledged by feminist scholars and activists that the UN Women's Decade (1975-85) and the series of UN-sponsored global conferences through the 1990s helped facilitate a flowering of grassroots feminisms across the world and their networking transnationally. I contend that transnational feminist practices vis-à-vis the WSF and on the anti-globalization terrain reflect a significant and multifaceted transition in transnational feminist politics from that which took shape in interactions with the UN processes. This transition has been underway since the mid-1990s in response both to the ascendancy of the project of neoliberal globalization and the myriad crises that it has represented for feminist policy agendas, as well as intensifying interaction with diverse other social movements on the anti-globalization terrain, which includes but is not limited to the WSF. In this article, I seek to demonstrate that these transmutations are evident across this diverse feminist field, despite the plurality, diversity and even conflict among different feminisms.

The hallmarks of this transition evident in feminist praxis at the WSF are as follows: A deep auto-critique of the effects of feminist engagement at the UN which has heretofore over-determined the meaning and politics of transnational feminism; a (re)new(ed) commitment to activism and to world-wide feminist movement-building; a (re)new(ed) commitment and capacity for alliance-building with other social movements, including "mixed" movements and women's movements that eschew the label feminist; a resistance to confining feminism and, indeed, other social movements, to sectoral domains and the concomitant claim that feminists have the right, the capacity and the responsibility to formulate holistic visions and strategies for progressive social transformation.

Feminist reflections on feminism's travel through the UN are both appreciative of its gains and lessons and critically aware of its constraining effects on transnational feminist politics and utopian imaginations (e.g. Harcourt 2006). About its limitations, there is a thoroughgoing awareness and auto-critique, for example, of the NGO-form and the complex of gains and dangers inherent in NGO-ization, and the accompanying risks of incorporation into statist and developmentalist projects. Related to this is the emergence of a "transnational activist class" apparent in all expressions of transnational feminist activism, whether at the UN, grounded in particular localities, or instantiated in the global justice movement (Desai 2008:33). The transnational activist class is composed of educated and professional men and women of the middle classes, mostly from the Global North but also drawn significantly from select countries of the Global South, who move freely back and forth between the UN, international NGOs, the academy and government.

UN-focused feminist politics and scholarship about the international women's movement, its leading actors and their agendas, its particular practices and discourses and the critiques of them, overdetermine what is understood now as transnational or global feminism.² One of the problematic effects of this in terms of the anti-globalization movement and WSF is that the diversity of transnationally-engaged but localized feminist practices disappears and other transnational feminist practices, such as the World March of Women discussed below, which are not so marked by the UN history, too often disappear from view and from analytic consideration.

Among the diverse feminisms of the WSF, there is a continuum of positionings, historically and politically, vis-a-vis this history, from celebration to critical appropriation to outright repudiation, which are in some flux. These different relations to this history mark feminist positionalities vis-a-vis each other, the WSF, and other movements. The major networks which have committed to the WSF as an alternative radical domain all share this critique, although to differing degrees and in different terms.

Transnational feminisms at the World Social Forum: broad convergence amid diversity

The World March of Women (the March) and Articulaci3n Feminista Marcosur (AFM) have been the most prominent and influential transnational feminist networks in the WSF in that they have been continually present from the WSF's origins, they are active in its governance bodies at multiple scales, they organize their own events in and around the social forum, and they enter into diverse collaborations with feminist and non-feminist others at the WSF. Each of these major feminisms is a transnational network in that each is composed of a number of constituent feminist groups based in different countries. The

²Desai's work self-consciously departs from this. She argues that transnational feminisms takes at least three forms: that focused on the UN conferences, "transnational grassroots activism" and feminist activism around global justice (Desai 2008:33).

Articulación is a regional-scale transnational network based in Latin America, comprised of nine networks in eight countries, mostly in the Southern Cone. The March can justifiably be called global, with 6,000 groups active in 163 countries and present on all continents.

The World March of Women

Although I will argue that there is demonstrably broad convergence between them, these networks have emerged from distinct political histories and evince distinct political cultures, priorities, and discourses. The origins of the World March of Women lie in the organizing of a ten-day mass march in 1994 to protest deepening poverty under neoliberalism in Québec. The March was so successful, both as a grassroots mobilization and as a pressure campaign, that Québec feminists introduced the idea of a world march at a workshop at the United Nations conference in Beijing in 1995. A series of actions orchestrated by local and national scale committees around the world, unified by a shared platform of demands focused both on poverty and myriad forms of violence against women, constituted the World March. The actions began on March 8, 2000 (International Women's Day) and continued over the next eight months, culminating in an action at the United Nations on October 17, 2000 (International Day for the Elimination of Poverty) in which a petition with over 500,000 signatures was presented. Six hundred groups from 163 countries participated. By 2003, 5500 women's groups were participating and by 2005, over 6000 (Dufour 2005: 2,6; World March of Women 2004: 234).

Since 2001, the March has become a prominent presence on the international scene, especially in the spaces of social protest against neoliberal globalization. In the WSF, the World March regularly organizes a multi-national contingent with strong roots in the host region. Their lavender flags and T-shirts are highly visible throughout the streetscapes and events of the forum. The March's commitment to grassroots mobilization, street action and the claiming of public space resonates with many other iterations of the anti-globalization movements, especially among youth, and also characterizes its presence in the WSF. Drumming, chanting, singing, and theatrics enrich and disrupt the spaces of the World Social Forum and "question the practices, codes and consciousness of those who are our 'partners' in the daily fight to make another world possible." (World March of Women - Globalization and Alliances Collective 2005)

In 2005, the March launched its second global-scale initiative, the Women's Global Charter for Humanity. Through an elaborate year-long process of articulation and negotiation among its members, the March sought to generate a collective vision, rooted in the 17 demands of the 2000 World March Platform but oriented to alternative proposals (World March of Women 2003). The Charter was targeted at governments and international institutions (UN, IMF, World Bank, WTO) as well as at the March's allied movements and local communities (World March of Women 2003: 3).

A world relay of the Charter, in which it was handed from one women's group to another, "from one world region to another, one country to another, and one village to another" (World March of Women 2003, 2) traversed political borders, bio-regional boundaries and cultural differences. It began on March 8, 2005 in Brazil and ended in Burkina Faso on October 17, 2005 with stops in 53 countries and territories. The round-the-world journey of the Charter concluded with "24 hours of global feminist solidarity," a rolling sequence of one-hour actions beginning in Oceania and following the sun westward around the globe. The relay march was accompanied by the creation of a massive quilt. Women were invited to illustrate their vision with pieces of cloth that were then relayed with the Charter across the world, constructing the Global Patchwork Solidarity Quilt over the course of the world journey of the Charter.

In 2010, another world-scale mobilization was mounted, comprised of actions in 56 countries and involving an estimated 80,000 people. Major regional events were held in Colombia, Congo and Turkey with a strong, shared focus on opposition to militarization and war, on violence against women in zones of conflict, and on strengthening women's protagonism in the resolution of conflicts.³

Articulación Feminista Marcosur

Articulación Feminista Marcosur is a Latin American feminist initiative, a "space for feminist intervention in the global arena", born as a response to the limitations and contradictions of the UN-focused transnational feminism of the 1990s. The Articulación has been known for its strong defense of sexual and reproductive rights and for the visibilization of these issues in the global justice milieu, especially through the WSF process.

In the 2002 WSF, these feminists spearheaded a major Campaign Against Fundamentalisms, linking the economic fundamentalism of neoliberalism with rising ethnic and religious fundamentalisms. Cardboard masks depicting giant lips were sported by thousands of participants in the WSF's many street demonstrations. The accompanying slogan was "your mouth is fundamental against fundamentalisms." In a single symbol, the masks captured the realities of people silenced by fundamentalisms, people who can speak but are afraid to, and those who raise their voices in protest. This mobilization reappeared in 2003 and 2005 WSFs in Porto Alegre, 2004 in Mumbai, and 2007 in Nairobi.

In the context of the WSF, the Articulación has recognized the need for dialogue across difference among feminists. In 2003, 120 feminists from a dozen networks, primarily from Latin America, gathered in a pre-WSF strategy meeting. According to participants, there was widespread agreement on the importance of carrying feminist perspectives into global movements for social change and assuming greater leadership roles, particularly at the WSF. The participants saw feminist analyses on the intersections of race, class, gender,

³See <http://www.mmf2010.info/>.

sexuality, nation and so on, as critical contributions to global social justice movements, including the movement against neoliberalism. Likewise, in their foregrounding of fundamentalism, militarism, and patriarchy, feminist analyses and politics had much to contribute to the discourses of more narrowly economic justice movements. These feminists went on to plan how they might bring the Campaign Against Fundamentalism to the 2004 WSF in Mumbai, India and make links with Indian and Asian networks (Eschle et al. 2010).

This effort bore fruit in the "Building Solidarities: Feminist Dialogues" event hosted by the Indian National Network of Autonomous Women's Groups immediately prior to the 2004 WSF in Mumbai. The event took place over two days, involved 140 women, and successfully broadened regional diversity relative to the 2003 feminist encounter in Brazil. The Feminist Dialogues have been rightly celebrated by some participants as a unique forum for feminists to explore sensitive issues in the global women's movement: North-South dynamics/inequalities; differing priorities around such issues as reproductive rights, violence against women or economic justice; differing choices of scales of activity, institutional venues, and socio-cultural terrains for feminist work; differing assessments of human rights perspectives and strategies; women's engagement with religion and understandings of religious fundamentalisms in different cultural settings.⁴ The Dialogues are also seen as an opportunity to advance feminist understandings of the linkages among neoliberalism, fundamentalisms, neoconservatism, communalism and militarism in the present conjuncture and what this means for women's rights and feminist strategies (Barton in Duddy 2004).

In the WSF, each of these networks, the *Articulación* and the March, is part of distinct clusters of allied feminist groups – a pattern of collaboration and a feminist fault line that only became visible to me in 2007 and after numerous WSF events. The groups of each cluster regularly collaborate in mounting events and supporting one another's initiatives in the WSF but notably do not participate in the others' initiatives. These distinct clusters of feminist collaboration - (1) the Latin American and international groups endorsing the *Articulación's* Campaign Against Fundamentalism⁵ (2) the cluster associated

⁴See Feminist Dialogues Co-ordinating Group (2006, 5–6) for an account of the historical emergence of the Feminist Dialogues. For an account of the developing organizational practices of the Feminist Dialogues, see Gandhi and Shah (2006). For background documents, speeches, and reports of FD events, including audio files and a photo gallery, see <http://feministdialogues.isiswomen.org>. See the *Articulación* web site www.mujaeresdelsur.org.uy for historical documents on the Feminist Dialogues and the *Articulación's* activities at the WSF.

⁵ CLADEM (Latin American and Caribbean Committee for the Defense of Women's Rights), REPEM (Women's Popular Education Network), Latin American and Caribbean Health Network; Network of Women and Habitat, September 28th Campaign, Campaign for the Convention on Sexual and Reproductive Rights, all networks which were co-sponsoring the *Articulación's* Campaign Against Fundamentalism (*Articulación Feminista Marcosur* 2004).

with the Feminist Dialogues after 2004 - which overlaps with the first⁶ and (3) the distinct grouping, also heavily Latin American, working in collaboration with the March⁷ - reappear repeatedly before and after Mumbai in the program of the WSF.

As feminists all operating in the male-dominated spaces of the WSF, their efforts are broadly convergent. The AFM and the March co-operate on the WSF's International Council where they bring long-standing feminist concerns about process, inclusion and participation in organizational practices and governance. Feminists across the board are acutely attuned to the gendered power dynamics in the WSF, in both its events and governance structures. They note that women regularly comprise half or more of the participants in the WSF yet remain a small fraction of the speakers and recognized leaders of the WSF. Although this problem has been more successfully confronted at some moments in some contexts, it continues to be a pervasive problem. Feminists thus continually contest the reproduction of masculinist practices in the WSF, including incidents of violence against women in the events, as has happened several times, and the marginalization of women as thinkers and knowers, and the dismissal of feminism as an intellectual and political resource.⁸ As recently as 2008, the March again went on record condemning the sexism that pervades the governance structures and organizational praxis of the WSF, saying "there is no recognition, inside the International Council or in the methodology of WSF, of the present power relationships and a commitment to change them." (World March of Women 2008: 6)

Transnational feminisms at the WSF: axes of difference

While the transnational feminisms discussed here are broadly convergent in terms of their interventions over the WSF, they lead strangely parallel lives within the WSF. The following study arose from my experience at the 2007 World Social Forum in Nairobi in which I detected the presence of two distinct feminist camps, each mounting a series of events in the forum which was largely

⁶ Articulación Feminista Marcosur, Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era-South East Asia (DAWN), the African Women's Development and Communication Network (FEMNET), INFORM Human Rights Documentation Centre (Sri Lanka), ISIS International, the National Network of Autonomous Women's Groups (India), and the Women's International Coalition for Economic Justice (WICEJ). These seven groups went on to constitute the Co-ordinating Group of the Feminist Dialogues and in 2006 were joined by five more: Akina Mama wa Africa, Women Living Under Muslim Laws (WLUML), Latin American and Caribbean Youth Network for Sexual and Reproductive Rights (REDLAC), CLADEM and REPEM.

⁷ Agencia Latino Americano de Información (ALAI), Red Latinoamericano Mujeres Transformando la Economía (REMTE - Network of Women Transforming the Economy), South-South LGBT Dialogue, and Women of Via Campesina.

⁸ There have been reports of rape in the youth camps in Brazil and an incident in Nairobi in which a lesbian speaker was booed off the main stage and then chased and physically threatened. See Roskos and Willis (2007), Koopman (2007), and other contributions to the special issue of the *Journal of International Women's Studies* (8/3) April 2007.

ignored by the other. As I followed each of these feminist pathways through the WSF, I began to discern distinct feminist projects and of sharpening difference and palpable tension between them. Based on a sampling of both these groups of events, I observed some striking differences and my initial conclusions have been sustained as I have followed these feminisms and charted their practices and discourses across place and time in the WSF process. These differences have to do with who are the proper subjects of feminism, the status of place and the local in transnational feminism, and the putatively privileged status of gender in feminist politics. These differences play out in distinct approaches to the feminist politics of movement building, both across diverse feminisms and in relation to non-feminist women's and mixed movements.

By the 2007 WSF in Nairobi, the Feminist Dialogues had taken shape as a transnational feminist project with its own particular politics and aiming to make specific and coherent feminist interventions in the 2007 WSF program. The Co-ordinating Group of the Feminist Dialogues sponsored a number of activities, including workshops on feminist movement building and on feminists' building anti-globalization alliances against fundamentalisms. They also organized a wonderfully dynamic Women's Rally that attracted hundreds of women in a noisy march through the WSF grounds. Many of the marchers sported the cardboard lip masks of the *Articulación's* campaign against fundamentalisms. The Feminist Dialogues' events attracted almost exclusively female audiences, many of them self-identified feminists that I recognized from the pre-WSF Feminist Dialogues event, which had been open only to self-identified feminists (Conway 2007a). Many appeared to be largely professional, urbanized, and middle or upper class women.

In contrast, the March's events were noticeably more mixed in terms of gender and class. One event focused on their Global Women's Charter began with the activists' displaying the March's giant, multi-story quilt draped over a steep outdoor staircase. It succeeded in attracting a different constituency, including lots of men and some of the women vending fruit and drinks in the stadium. The event featured women activists from a local poor people's organization in a public effort to build the World March in Kenya. The World March of Women sponsored a number of additional events: on migration and violence against women; on food sovereignty and the need for alliances between rural and urban women; and on women and work. The World March also worked in coalition with other feminist and non-feminist groups in a variety of ways. The March co-sponsored the IV Social Forum on Sexual Diversity with LGBT South-South Dialogue with its allied Latin American feminist organizations. It collaborated with a diverse group of organizations to host two events on labour and globalization, including Transform Italia, Focus on the Global South, Campaign for the Welfare State, G10 Solidaire and several Italian labour groups and took the lead in organizing the WSF's Social Movements Assembly. The difference in the class and gender composition of the two groups of events was striking even as the substantive foci of the events were at first glance broadly convergent, certainly not at odds.

The status of "place" and "the local" in the practices and discourses of both the World March and the Feminist Dialogues appeared as another noticeable difference. The March is constituted as a co-ordination of place-based "grassroots" feminisms, concretely engaged in specific geographies, on context-specific struggles pertaining to poverty and violence against women, in place-specific terms. The Feminist Dialogues are constituted primarily by self-described transnational feminist networks. In their everyday activities, these networks may be embedded in place-specific ways but their discourses and practices as they instantiate the Feminist Dialogues largely avoid place-based specificities. While speakers associated with the Feminist Dialogues may identify themselves by world region, their discourses about neoliberalism, fundamentalism and militarization tend to be globalist in nature and abstracted from particular struggles on the ground anywhere. A focus on place and the local are preconditions, although not the equivalent, of a grassroots praxis and, I suggest, a significant factor in explaining the distinctive political cultures of the feminisms under discussion.

While the Feminist Dialogues is thoroughly international, its leadership in Nairobi especially in terms of who facilitated and spoke in its WSF events was far more Latin American and South Asian than African or Kenyan. In their political culture, the Feminist Dialogues' events had the character of international meetings that could have been taking place anywhere in the world. Being in Africa seemed largely incidental. The World March of Women, on the other hand, engaged in a thoroughgoing place-based internationalism:

We knew from the outset that the absence of a World March National Co-ordinating Body in Kenya would be problematic for the organization of our activities at the Forum. Fortunately, we were assisted by a young woman who belongs to a feminist theatre troupe that treats various issues of importance to Kenyan society...Thanks to their hard work, the March delegation included women from the poorest neighbourhoods of Nairobi and we now have the foundation to form a March coordinating body in Kenya...

We wanted to use the opportunity presented by the WSF to give a voice to the women's movement of Africa and reinforce its leadership within the World March of Women. Women from some 10 African countries who are active in the March attended the WSF (World March of Women 2007).⁹

Despite its evident internationalism, the placeless cosmopolitanism of the Feminist Dialogues produce a strangely monocultural discourse, a product, I suspect, of the particular transnational circuits of feminist activism produced of the UN processes in the 1990s. Despite its critique and desire to break with the limits of those practices, the Feminist Dialogues reflects the circulation of people and discourses among academia, UN agencies, donors and international NGOs that feminist critics of UN-focused advocacy have repeatedly observed (e.g., Wilson 2007; Desai 2008). In an interview at the pre-WSF Feminist

⁹ In the summer of 2007 and flowing from this contact at the WSF, a chapter of the World March was established in Kenya

Dialogues event, Fatma Aloo of FEMNET, a co-sponsor of the Feminist Dialogues, had this to say:

I was in the process toward Beijing. I hear the same things here. The biggest challenge for the feminist movement is to link with grassroots, the not-privileged. The feminist movement has not even started... they're (gesturing to the room where the event was underway) still stuck in NGOism... also, it's the way this is organized... you would think that being in Kenya - as if there are no feminists in Kenya! - that it would be led by the Kenyans... I am sitting here with Wahu [Kaara, head of the Kenya Debt Relief Network]. Did you see her on a panel? (Aloo 2007)

The Dialogues' more abstracted, academic, and often place-less discourses clearly resonate with educated women inculturated in the transnational discursive and organizational circuits of feminist advocacy. The discourses of the Feminist Dialogues are more analytically sophisticated than those of the March. They are clearly informed by debates and developments in feminist scholarship and theory that are circulating internationally. One could readily discern this at its events but also by exploring its website. Although there are references to the state of the global feminist movement and instances of political exhortation, there is little attention paid to the concrete practices of organizing or coalition building. With the World March, the opposite is true: its practices of organizing are the substantive focus both of its events and the largely descriptive discourses its activists produce about the March itself.

The Feminist Dialogues are fostering convergence among self-identified feminists, cultivating anti-globalization feminist alliances across issues, sectors, and regions, building on the pre-existing transnational feminist circuits, cultures, discourses and ways of doing things developed through exposure to the UN processes, international donor agencies, NGO-ization and politics waged in terms of human rights. In contrast to the Feminist Dialogues' strongly articulated and explicitly *feminist* basis of unity, particularly on rights to abortion and sexual choice, the March is proceeding in practice to build another kind of feminist internationalism through its concrete attention to specific issues of concern to poor and marginalized women in specific places and with less regard as to whether they call themselves feminist, agree on abortion rights, or share the same discourse on sexual rights (Conway 2008).

One further way of situating the political tensions evident among these feminisms is in terms of a persistent dispute among them about the privileged status of gender vis-à-vis other axes of differentiation and oppression in women's struggles and feminist politics. In the context of the WSF, this cleavage plays out in conflicting understandings of gender justice and its imbrication with economic justice, which are reciprocally related to one's conceptualization of feminism, its boundedness as a movement, the domains of its agency, and the character of the world it is trying to confront and (re-)construct. What is at stake here is an *a priori* privilege granted to the body politics of sexuality and reproduction in conferring a feminist identity and determining feminist politics, over other issues with which diverse women's movements have concerned themselves. While the transnational feminisms most committed to (and shaped

by) the WSF process consistently strive to integrate gender and economic justice agendas politically and analytically, these tensions occur in and among these networks as well.

The World March locates a narrow understanding of gender justice in the more institutionalized (read: more politically conventional, less radical, more elite) expressions of international feminist politics. The March strenuously critiques the hierarchical ranking of issues which flows from it and its detrimental effects on the feminist politics of alliance building with the wide diversity of movements on the anti-globalization terrain (including women's movements which eschew the feminist label):

The trajectory of the international feminist movement is marked by a type of institutionalization specific to it that results in different perspectives and political strategies in terms of the priorities of the agenda of constructing alliances. In feminism, there still exist sectors that hierarchically order demands and policies/politics: those which are associated with the body, sexuality, and reproduction are considered as the central and strategic agenda, while those which refer to work or land are associated with practical demands or general struggles. This vision manifests itself in the segmentation of issues, in professionalization, in lobbying, and in [the pursuit of] public gender policies, often disconnected from consideration of neoliberalism or the privatization of the state. (Nobre & Trout 2008, my translation)

Despite intra-feminist tensions on these fronts - which are substantial with deep implications for the future of feminism, including its social composition, its boundedness as a movement, and its relations with other movements - the major feminist networks cited here are all protagonists in and over the WSF who, in their own ways, are actively striving to hold gender and economic concerns together and are seeking to build coalitions with other progressive movements. In fact, all feminisms acting in the anti-globalization milieu are being challenged to reach out beyond their current comfort zones, in thought and action (Borren 2005: 37).

Diverse feminist approaches to movement building

Even among feminist networks similarly committed to the WSF and to building alliances with other movements, differences in feminist visions, analyses, and priorities tangibly shape their appearance and their modes of relating to other movements. Distinct approaches to the WSF and distinct patterns of alliance building with other movements correlate to different feminist traditions and priorities - between those who emphasize a non-negotiable core of feminist politics prioritizing sexuality and reproduction versus those who stress women's gendered economic struggles for food, land, and work. They thus resonate with the intra-feminist debate over the privileged status of gender discussed above, even as they cannot be reduced to that.

The Articulación has organized inter-movement dialogues in and around the WSF, both across different currents in international feminism as described

above, and between feminist and other movements. Breaking down sectoral enclosures in which different social movements were discursively confined emerged as a key priority for the organizers of the Feminist Dialogues preceding the 2004 WSF. They went on to host an inter-movement dialogue in Mumbai involving two speakers from each of four movements: women's, sexuality rights, labour and dalit rights/racial justice movements. Each was asked to speak to how their movement had incorporated class, gender, race and sexuality questions, the dilemmas and problems they had confronted and the strategies they had employed. Activists from the other movements were asked to respond. Then the second speaker from the original movement was asked to comment, refute or clarify. This proceeded through four rounds and was moderated. This format was repeated in subsequent years in Porto Alegre in 2005, Nairobi in 2007 and Belem in 2009 (Shah 2005; Gandhi et al. 2006).

Such inter movement dialogues are communicative practices that are critical in fostering intelligibility across difference and are themselves constitutive of movement building across issues, sectors, and regions. These dialogues proceed largely in the terms set by their feminist organizers, notably through analytical discourses of intersectionality which make foundational the recognition of multiplicity - of social subjects, struggles, and strategies - while insisting on the intersectional character of the movements' respective concerns (Desai 2005; Conway, 2011).

The feminists of the *Articulación Feminista Marcosur* thus see the WSF primarily as a space for advancing open-ended dialogue across difference among the movements, which they see as foundational for building democratic political cultures. Emerging from post-dictatorship Latin America, the feminists of *Articulación Feminista Marcosur* are preoccupied primarily with the question of democratization, in their societies and in the movements. The defense of diversity and the fostering of a political culture respectful of pluralism are foundational to their feminism and their politics more generally. The boundedness and specificity of feminism as a movement defined around body politics are firmly drawn but, for them, the pursuit of gender justice is understood as a struggle for the democratization of gender relations within a thorough-going and multi-faceted struggle for society-wide democratization and against myriad expressions of authoritarianism. Theirs is indisputably a transversal politics - albeit one that focuses on the body as the site of intersecting social struggles.¹⁰

In some contrast to the "dialogue across difference" approach to movement building in the WSF, the World March of Women aims to advance practical collaboration among movements on concrete issues and campaigns. The March works in sustained, campaign-focused ways - bilaterally with selected other

¹⁰ Although Vargas and AFM explicitly advocate the integration of social and economic rights with women's struggle for gender justice, they also see sexual rights as the most controversial and resisted terrain, including within progressive movements. These feminists argue that the body is at the centre of political debates over individual freedoms, and thus for struggles over democratization (Vargas 2006: 204–5, 2009: 150–52).

movements in advancing concrete issues and collectively with them in the Assembly of Social Movements. Thus the March engages more consistently in the ambiguous spaces of the anti-globalization movement, actively and concretely building trust and partnerships in practice with *non-feminist* but broadly emancipatory movements. The March's coalition-building efforts also rely on dialogue and the negotiation of difference, but these dialogues arise in the context of practical collaboration on concrete issues involving a fuller range of activist partners and practices, in which it is a strong feminist partner which brings its own intellectual, political and mobilizational resources but does not set the rules of engagement.

The March's commitment to building a mass base and engaging in grassroots mobilization, street action and the claiming of public space, their rejection of lobbying and critique of institutional engagement, resonates with other militant movements on the anti-globalization terrain. The March thus approaches the WSF more pragmatically and instrumentally as a "convergence space". Unlike the transnational feminist networks behind the inter-movement dialogues, the March's *raison d'être* is mass mobilization and it exists as a powerful, broad-based and autonomous movement in its own right, rather than a loose network of groups that periodically collaborate. The World March represents a different kind of feminist transnationalism from that of most feminist NGOs active internationally in that, from its origins, it has been oriented to mass movement building --not just among women and feminists, but cross-sectorally with mixed and non-feminist movements with whom it could construct political alliances against neoliberalism. In the diversity of its constituent groups in terms of sectors, scales and modes of activities, in its reliance on "contentious politics" more than lobbying, and in its articulation to the anti-globalization mobilizations, the March represents novel developments in the field of transnational feminist politics, which has been heavily marked by its travels through the UN processes and resulting NGO-ization (Conway, 2007b; Giraud and Dufour 2010).

The discourses and practices of the World March, with their strong emphases on anti-capitalism, anti-imperialism, and coalition building with other movements of the left, draw clearly on the legacies of socialist feminism. The class composition and political commitment to popular-sector, "grassroots" feminisms, coupled with its particular orientations to the local and the place-based relative to the transnational, distinguish it from other expressions of transnational feminism under discussion. For the World March of Women, the *raison d'être* of the WSF is to foster convergence among diverse movements and to enhance their capacities to act in alliance with one another. In their view, the WSF provided a productive mode of gathering diverse (even divergent) movements at a time when neoliberal hegemony had paralyzed thinking about political possibilities, and movements were split between those still relating to political institutions and those who eschewed those possibilities. The WSF allowed for a rapprochement between diverging camps (Nobre & Trout 2008).

Common knowledge(s): feminist contributions to the politics of global justice

Although the transnational feminisms at the WSF constitute an internally diverse feminist field, the networks under discussion all reflect the working out in practice of the multifaceted historical transition underway in transnational feminist politics outlined above. While different feminisms exhibit significant differences arising from their distinct political histories, orientations, and institutionalizations, they also draw from a common well of knowledges produced through the transnationalization of feminism in the late 20th century. Despite internal pluralism, tensions and differences, transnational feminism as an identifiable political current is a carrier of distinct perspectives and knowledges onto the anti-globalization terrain. This last section attempts to map these feminist knowledges as they are being brought to bear in/on the WSF.

I identify the following: the feminist analytics of intersectionality and related practice of transversality; feminist interventions about the bounds of acceptable difference; the feminist critique of the global left's critiques of neoliberalism; alternative genealogies of the anti-globalization movement which surface through feminist accounts; and analyses of the gendered cultures of anti-globalization movements. The first three are anchored in the writings produced by activists in the different networks under discussion vis-à-vis their engagement with the WSF process. The convergence displayed here evinces the cross-fertilization at work across feminist difference in a complex and pluralistic movement. The last two are reflective of a more dispersed commentary on the WSF produced by feminist activists beyond the major networks under discussion but not at odds, I think, with perspectives shared by the these networks.

Feminist analytics of intersectionality and the practice of transversality

Like other social forces on the anti-globalization terrain, feminisms are actively and increasingly seeking ways to collaborate with the whole range of emancipatory movements in their various contexts and at various scales. Irene León of ALAI, active with the World March, comments that this signals a transition and expansion in feminist praxis, in feminists' addressing a much broader social agenda and society as a whole (2005: 21). This is true of all the movements. They are being transformed as they interact with each other more intensely and as they contemplate society as a whole - not just their historically more discrete issues or arenas (Burch 2005: 43-44).

This recent shift in transnational feminist politics, in my view, must be further situated in relation to analytical developments in feminism underway since the late 1970s in response to the eruption of women-of-colour and indigenous feminisms, particularly in the US, and to "third world feminisms" in the global arena. These developments have transformed feminist movements and

subjectivities, rendering them more porous to other feminisms and to other equality-seeking movements. As we can see, this has been a historically uneven process, but this more open positioning defines the major transnational feminist networks active at the WSF.

Analytically, feminists have theorized the interactive and intersectional character of domination based on the mutually-reinforcing dynamics of oppressions based on gender, race, ethnicity, sexuality, and class, among other axes of social hierarchy and differentiation.¹¹ Gender relations have come to be understood in ways that intersect with myriad other forms of hierarchy and difference, and the struggle for more equitable gender relations has come to be understood as integrated and aligned with the whole range of movements for equality, rights, and democratization (Vargas 2003a: 918).

In the WSF, these theoretical orientations find diverse practical expression. Among feminists, we can see the efforts to hold gender and economic justice together, as discussed above. Another is through a commitment to transversality. The feminist commitment to transversality is based on standpoint epistemologies, that is that distinct knowledges emerge from particular social locations and that the knowledges of the historically marginalized should be privileged in constructing any emancipatory politics that claims to be acting on their behalf.¹² A politics of transversality holds that women and feminists, along with all historically marginalized voices, should be addressing the whole of a transformative agenda, rather than be relegated to assigned silos based on single issues. One of the ways that racist patriarchy functions, at the WSF and elsewhere, is through restricting various subjects to pre-assigned domains. A praxis of transversality is premised on the conviction that all subjects should speak to all issues, while simultaneously recognizing and ameliorating historical exclusions in amplifying the voices of the historically marginalized (Chancoso 2005: 147; Mtetwa 2005: 134–37).¹³

For prominent feminist networks, the commitment to the transversality of historically marginalized voices is *the* methodology of the WSF (World March of Women 2008: 6), and a process that, in itself, will promote the emergence of new subjects and new questions (Vargas 2003b: 40). In the view of these feminists, such transversal politics entail a complexification and expansion of the anti-globalization movement's agenda and a positive vision of alter-globalization. For these feminists, the commitment to transversality is both a political practice and an epistemological principle but, emergent within it, is

¹¹ For accounts of the history of these developments, see Yuval-Davis (2006).

¹² Epistemological debates have been central to the politics of the second wave of feminism. See Alcoff and Potter (1993); Hill Collins (2000). For more contemporary treatment, see Harding, S. (2008; 2004).

¹³ This understanding of transversality as a practice, which is the prevailing understanding among these feminists at the WSF, is distinct from the meanings of transversal politics in English-language scholarship on feminist politics, in which it refers to practices of alliances across boundaries of difference, initially among women of different races and classes in the US and UK. See Yuval-Davis (1997).

also a vision of another sociality, another social ordering, founded on an alternative regime of truth. This alternative regime of truth is grounded in the valorization of the knowledges produced by marginalized subjectivities and their mutual transformations through deep, sustained, democratic encounter. It is pluralist but not relativist in that it is informed by historical struggles against discrimination. And it is not naive about the operation of power and inequality, including on the putatively egalitarian ground of encounter among emancipatory movements.

Feminist commitments to intersectional analyses and transversal politics have been imported into the WSF, but with uneven effects. As a result of feminist pressure, gender and diversity have been affirmed since 2002 as transversal axes of all the social fora. Latin American feminists link this initiative explicitly to the WSF's agenda of overcoming *pensamientos únicos*,¹⁴ among which they include androcentric and ethnocentric forms of thought (I. León 2005: 13), along with neoliberal and other fundamentalisms. Practically speaking, the transversality of gender and diversity is a strategy to promote the inclusion of different movement sectors in all the thematic areas of the WSF's programme. This principle is important to disrupt preconceptions about who are the experts and in what domains and to allow for fuller, more adequate strategies over more extended fields of action (Mendonça 2005: 108). Beyond rhetorical exhortation, though, it is not clear what the concrete results of this strategy have been in the non-feminist spaces of the forum. Declarations of transversality without concrete organizing strategies can become a license for doing nothing further - and indeed, this has been recognized as a danger within the WSF (M. León 2006).

However, the feminist commitments to intersectionality and transversality have had a number of important effects on *feminist* alter-globalization discourses and, through their persistent interventions, also on the WSF. Firstly, feminists have been central to enlarging the language of shared opposition in the WSF to include explicit recognition of a multiplicity of oppressions, of struggles, and of political subjects. In some contexts, notably in Mumbai in 2004, the WSF has been noticeably transformed as a result (Barria and Nelson 2008: 39-40). Secondly, feminist engagements have produced more complicated theorizations of neoliberalism, as discussed below. Thirdly, feminists' praxis of transversality has put them at the heart of cross-movement dialogues and coalition building in the alter-globalization milieu - and therefore at the very centre of the WSF's *raison d'être*, as described above.

¹⁴This is a phrase in widespread use in the Spanish, Portuguese and French-speaking quarters of the anti-globalization movement. It refers to unitary ways of thinking that suppress the possibility of any alternative to that way of thinking. Neoliberalism is the paradigmatic example. Opposition to *pensamiento(s) único(s)* is definitive of the WSF, although this is rarely recognized in English-language reporting. Feminists have insisted that there are plural examples of such fundamentalist ways of thinking and that they appear in oppositional movements as well as among neoliberals (Vargas 2003a, 914).

Diversity, equality and the bounds of acceptable difference

Central to the claims of major feminist networks in the WSF is the inseparability of the principles of diversity and equality. While the affirmation of diversity has been foundational to the forum, in theory and practice, its relation to equality is less secure. As noted above, while nominally, gender and diversity have long been established as transversal axes of all the social fora, gender equality is far from being realized.

The defense of diversity and pluralism is central to feminist politics in the WSF and more generally. Feminists see this as foundational to the struggle against *pensamientos únicos*. Diverse subjectivities, ways of life and social struggles for dignity are the source of alternative knowledges and therefore essential to making other, better worlds imaginable and possible. In this view, the WSF is creating the conditions for an epistemological revolution: the capacity to know the world in and through its diversity (León, I. 2006a: 335). But this is to be undertaken within a commitment to combat all forms of hierarchy and discrimination. Therefore, it is not a relativist embrace of pluralism or a simple tolerance of endless difference.

This is a post-liberal politics of pluralism in which diversity and equality are insistently held together and which calls for both a rejection of discourses and practices associated with histories of male chauvinism, racism, and homophobia, and affirmative action in the open space in favour of groups historically discriminated against.

Following the 2007 WSF in Nairobi, a group of feminist entities aligned with AFM made a strenuous intervention in the debates about open space in voicing their concerns about the presence of church groups opposed to sexual and reproductive rights. The latter had organized an anti-abortion march, preached against birth control and in favour of abstinence within the forum space. Evoking the principles of diversity and individual autonomy in constructing radical democracy, the feminist commentators affirmed the presence of LGBT movements in the Forum and rejected "fundamentalist manifestations" of those who would deny sexual and reproductive rights. They reiterated that the WSF is a process open to all "that recognize this diversity" but that those who "promote the marginalization, exclusion and discrimination of other human beings, are alien to this process." (Articulación Feminista Marcosur 2007)

Feminists recognize that, as important the principles of self-organization and self-management are to the WSF, allowing these principles alone to structure the open space leads to the reproduction of historic inequalities, exclusions and the over-representation of culturally dominant and materially privileged groups (REMTE and World March of Women 2005). Such principles can thus act at cross-purposes with the intent to create open spaces that enable social diversity to be expressed in ways that are both more representative of the social reality and reflective of the ethos of myriad struggles against discrimination.

While such formulations do not resolve all problems of adjudication across difference among the enormous diversity of movements opposed to

neoliberalism, they do reflect more nuanced and complicated ways of thinking about the praxis of open space: a space that requires both affirmative action and collective regulation in order to protect it as a space hospitable to the world's diverse movements.

The enormous presence of church groups at the Nairobi event, their undeniable presence and legitimacy in poor communities, and their historic roles in human rights and anti-apartheid struggles in Africa, confronted the WSF with a major intellectual and political provocation about the status of religious traditions, discourses and organizations in the movement, and the boundaries of acceptable difference. Many of the leading movements of the WSF, feminisms among them, are rooted in the emancipatory discourses of modernity and are resolutely "secular". They are deeply ambivalent, if not outright prejudicial, toward anything that smacks of "religion".¹⁵ But the question of religion, both in world affairs and in the global justice movement, is not going away and the Nairobi event indisputably put this on the WSF agenda.

Similarly, indigenous movements with their discourses of gender complementarily and their increasingly audible critiques of modernity, confront many feminisms with deep challenges to their long-established formulations. However, feminist discourses emanating from contexts in which there are strong indigenous movements and in which there are histories of concrete cross-movement collaboration demonstrate possibilities for constructive engagement.¹⁶ Notably, these discourses refer more substantively to struggles against racism and colonialism, which are largely absent in other feminist discourses arising in the context of the WSF, notwithstanding the rhetorical inclusion of "race" in analytics of intersectionality.¹⁷

The feminist praxis of dialogue among diversities seeks to confront the interpretive frameworks of all the movements (including feminisms) with what they do not attend to: "In the WSF, feminists are in dialogue and debate to transcend their own limits, democratizing their interactions and avoiding their own 'fundamentalist' or single minded versions of what is possible." (Vargas 2009:159 citing (Feminist Dialogues Co-ordinating Group 2006) "Openness to diversity identifies new dimensions of struggle, not for a better *world*, in the singular, but for other better *worlds* that will reflect many emancipatory perspectives." (Vargas 2009:155)

The fight for inclusion based on a recognition and valorization of multiplicity, while also problematizing the open space as an open market for all in which the most powerful and best resourced actors can dominate, is generating novel political theories, most fully articulated by Vargas and her colleagues at AFM:

¹⁵For a critical discussion of secularism in the WSF, see Daulatzai 2004. For relevant discussion of secular as religion and "religion" as itself a problematic term, see Balibar 2007

¹⁶See numerous contributions to León, I. (2006b), a collection of essays produced following the first Social Forum of the Americas in Quito, Ecuador.

¹⁷On the absence of "race" in Latin American feminisms and the putative remoteness of colonialism, see Lavrin (1998: 527–529, 531). For critique of the latter, see John (1998: 540).

Feminists have begun to widen their political categories, such as democracy, to make them more complex. The search for a concept of democracy that is plural and radical remains central to their thinking and attempts to recover the diversity of experiences and aspirations that neoliberal model, which emphasizes elections and minimizes the redistributive responsibilities of the state, denies. It nurtures democratic, secular, untutored visions that are transcultural rather than Western and works on different scales and dimensions, incorporating subjectivity into the transformation of social relations and generating multiple sites from which emancipatory democratic agendas can emerge. In this process, struggles *against* material and symbolic exclusions and *for* redistributive justice and recognition create a new politics of the body (Vargas 2009:150).

Feminist critiques of the critique of neoliberalism

Feminists across the political spectrum in the WSF insist that univocal opposition to neoliberalism, capitalism, or imperialism so widely promulgated on the left and in the movements of the WSF is both insufficient and deeply problematic. Feminist engagements have produced more complicated theorizations of neoliberalism itself as a sexist, racist, and homophobic project with uneven effects on human populations beyond those of class, region, or nation, in which the oppression of women and exploitation of their labour is deeply implicated.¹⁸ Feminists have also productively analyzed neoliberalism as a form of fundamentalism, thus linking it with other reactionary social movements and connecting struggles for gender justice against social conservatism with those for economic justice against liberal regimes.

Vargas, of AFM, sees in the hegemonic discourses of neoliberalism in the WSF a persistent hierarchical ranking of networks and issues, wherein some are considered more central than others. These are simultaneously epistemological hierarchies. She writes:

It is possible to announce [the articulation of multiple new identities gathered in the WSF] as a democratic political horizon [while] to construct in practice, . . . hierarchies of interpretation of the problems to be solved, as in economics, politics and world power versus subjectivity, diversity, discrimination, rights (2003b: 40)

She argues that such hierarchies of issues and analytical approaches flow from univocal understandings of neoliberalism, which in turn are underpinned by unitary conceptions of globality. The critique of neoliberalism itself appears as a form of *pensamiento único* that is not confronting its own contradictions or exclusions, as it seeks to subsume other affirmative agendas of rights and diversities into itself and thus denies the affirmation of multiple forms of justice and multiple democratizations (Vargas 2003b: 46).

For Diane Matte and the World March of Women, feminism's unique contribution to the WSF and to the movement against neoliberal globalization has to do with "questions at the heart of capitalism, about the basic relationship

¹⁸ See Faría (2005: 127) and Brewer (2010).

between men and women and between individuals and our collective societal relationship" (2005). These feminists insist on attention to women's oppression as a fundamental feature of contemporary social order, central to capitalism even as it predates it. Feminist understandings of the omnipresence of violence against women and old and new forms of commodification of women's bodies and lives shift and stretch critical analyses of neoliberalism. "We want all the movements to inscribe the analysis of patriarchy in the heart of the questioning of neoliberalism and imperialism - today symbolized mainly (but not exclusively) by the WSF" (World March of Women 2008: 4).

For the March, it has been important to be at the forefront of the WSF organizing process, where "it has been a struggle to get feminism recognized as an answer to neoliberal globalization . . . as a social movement that is bringing something that is central" and not simply as one of an infinite number of groups, identities, and strategies. "The central analysis [operating at the WSF] is still Marxist" (Matte 2005). In the March's view, feminism is itself a radical and egalitarian project of social transformation. It has its own specific and essential analytical and mobilizational resources to bring to a heterogeneous field of social struggles.

This is echoed by Carol Barton from the Women's International Coalition for Economic Justice:

In terms of our presence at the World Social Forum, we would make the bold case that you can not really understand the current dynamics in the world, in terms of the global economy, militarism, and the rise of the religious right in many countries and the impact these issues are having on people's lives, without a feminist analysis of patriarchy. It is an integral part of the way geopolitics are being played out... our long term goal is to bring that kind of feminist understanding to the social movements that are trying to challenge the current system. (in Duddy 2004)

Vargas argues that globalization, the sense of the world as a single space, has transformed living conditions and subjectivities for women in ambivalent ways. As many feminists have observed, the neoliberal withdrawal of the state from social provision has increased the burden on women to provide for families. However, economic restructuring has also transformed "tradition", including family forms and gender orders, opening up previously unexamined social practices to critique and negotiation. Thus, she observes, women are enacting new subjectivities characterized by a sense of their own autonomy, individuation, equality, and dignity (Vargas 2003b: 9–11).¹⁹ Feminist attention to the *contradictions* of various social arrangements for women have produced more multivalent understandings of neoliberalism, with many attendant challenges (which have hardly been taken up) for movements aligned against it and for feminists in alliance with those movements.

¹⁹ Vargas is a thoroughly modernist theorist, both in her understandings of capitalist globalization and of democracy. She draws unproblematically on theorists like Nancy Fraser and Chantal Mouffe in her formulations of radical democracy and on Anthony Giddens, Ulrich Beck and Manuel Castells in her understandings of globalization.

Alternative genealogies of anti-globalization

Politics opposed to neoliberalism appeared in feminist networks prior to and independent of the eruption of the so-called "anti-globalization" movement in Seattle in 1999 and the appearance of the WSF (Conway 2007b; Moghadam 2009; Eschle et al. 2010: 59ff.). Opposition to neoliberalism was stirring on the ground all over the world from the mid-1980s, including in place-based activisms against debt, structural adjustment, and free trade by women's and mixed movements. These activisms were influencing debates in transnational feminism, including at the United Nations, from the mid-1990s on.

Feminist genealogies of alter-globalization foreground the historical role of the United Nations in the globalization of social movements and their contemporary convergence against neoliberalism. In terms of the globalization of feminism, the UN Women's Decade (1975-85) and the series of conferences through the 1990s helped facilitate an efflorescence of grassroots feminisms across the world and their networking transnationally - in the days before new communication technologies made this more commonplace. Feminist scholars note that activists in these networks were among the first developing non-hierarchical and participatory transnational political organizations and practices - know-how and sensibilities that they brought into the global justice movement and to the WSF (Desai 2007: 798). Likewise, over thirty years of intense contact, conflict and negotiation across differences of nation, culture, language, religion, race and class, transnational feminists produced new ways of doing and theorizing emancipatory politics at the global scale, which have been imported into the WSF. Numerous authors have noted and analyzed feminist travels through the UN processes and how this has shaped feminist engagements at the WSF (Gouws 2007; Wilson 2007; Desai 2005; Roskos et al. 2007; Klugman 2007; Harcourt 2006) and accounts for differences and tensions among diverse feminisms in the forum.

Feminist writing has brought into view the UN processes, particularly the evolution of the parallel NGO fora, as important precursors of the WSF. These accounts foreground the powerful continuing attraction of the language of rights, reliance on international law, and at the national scale, on the paradigm of citizenship guaranteed by states that are frequently effaced in left politics and theory. These likewise remain largely unrecognized or unproblematized in broader scholarship on the global justice movement which more often takes as its starting point the mass mobilizations initiated in Seattle and focuses on their direct action currents.

In terms of building alliances for global justice, alternative genealogies of anti-globalization point to multiple legacies, discourses, and trajectories that have converged *but, significantly, not merged*, in the present. Different origin stories foreground distinct actors, places, political histories and civilizational legacies each with implications for our understandings of global justice. Recognizing and valorizing multiple genealogies of global justice is foundational for a global politics of solidarity.

The gendered culture of anti-globalization movements

Feminists engaged with the forum have been regularly and rightfully enraged in the face of myriad persistent forms of male domination, discrimination against women, dismissal of feminism, and even violence against women in this putatively open, egalitarian and emancipatory space.²⁰ Critiques of systemic sexism extend from the events themselves, to the organizing processes, to the governance bodies of the forum.

The phenomenon in which feminists and feminisms can be impressively present in a proliferation of grassroots, self-organized and often small-scale activities in the social forum program, as well as in the popular spaces and streetscapes of the forum, while being systematically ignored intellectually and politically in the non-feminist spaces of the forum, has continued to characterize WSFs and is mirrored in the overwhelmingly androcentric knowledge production about the forum.²¹

Feminism problematizes and protests this in terms of gender and sexuality.²² Feminism politicizes the question of knowledge production in terms of who speaks to and for the movement. Feminist attention to bodies, and embodied standpoints – to who is present, who is speaking, whose knowledges are granted authority – is unique in the intellectual and political interventions over the WSF and the anti-globalization movement.

The leaders in the putatively horizontal space of the WSF and those who speak authoritatively about it are gendered male. They are cosmopolitan, multi-lingual in European colonial languages and accustomed to speaking before crowds, often in academic discourses (Freudenschuss 2007: 43). They are light-skinned men of the European and Latin American left, occasionally joined by men of dominant races and classes from other regions. They promulgate univocal analyses of capitalism, in which sexism, racism, and other forms of oppression, when they are acknowledged at all, as in the WSF Charter, are understood as epiphenomena of capitalism (Freudenschuss 2007: 42). Writing about the anti-globalization movement more generally, Mohanty early on observed “the notably ungendered and deracialized discourse on activism against globalization” (Mohanty 2002: 517) and its “implicit masculinization” (Mohanty 2002: 529) as ironically reflecting the hegemonic discourses of globalization.

Feminists have observed a pattern of hegemonic and masculinist practices as the forum has occurred in various places and at multiple scales. Among other things, they have related this to a resurgence of Marx-inspired, capital-centric discourses that have revalorized class struggle and the subsuming of all other

²⁰See, for example Roskos, et al. (2007); Koopman (2007), and numerous other contributions to the special issue of the *Journal of International Women's Studies* (8/3), April 2007.

²¹Although there were breakthroughs evident elsewhere, notably in Mumbai, the preponderance of WSF events in Brazil mean that Brazilian-based experience overdetermines feminist commentary about the WSF process.

²² Despite feminist discourses of intersectionality, the feminisms of the WSF are virtually silent on race and indigeneity.

emancipatory struggles within its logic. In the process, the authority of those who promulgate such discourses has been reasserted. This expression of hegemonic masculinity has reappeared regularly in many left movements in the West and in anti-colonial nationalisms, in agonistic tension with other emancipatory subjectivities associated with the new social movements of the late 20th century.²³

In the context of pitched struggle for zero-sum victory over an ultimate enemy, which has characterized many expressions of anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist politics, the "left" is constructed as a zone apart from capitalist or other social relations of oppression. Embrace of radicalism (in whatever variant) confers innocence on both the movement and its men as they consider themselves exempt from examining their own gendered, raced and classed positionalities, from acknowledging their own privilege, and recognizing how their everyday practices in the movement and in the forum can reproduce dynamics of oppression or marginalization.

Feminists consistently insist that the movement is not a world apart from the social relations of the world that it is seeking to transform, any more than the "private" sphere of the household and intimate relations can be thought of as insulated from the power relations associated with the "public" sphere. Patterns of domination, marginalization and exclusion, as well as power, authority, and over-representation get replicated in movement spaces unless there is explicit commitment and concrete strategies to disrupt these patterns. The persistent refusal to recognize gender (among other forms of) power and privilege within the movement as well as more generally explains, in part at least, the continuing marginalization of feminism, despite feminism's originary presence and myriad contributions, and widespread rhetorics valorizing diversity and pluralism in the WSF.²⁴

Feminist critique of the anti-globalization movement is an extension of its commitment to critical reflexivity about its own practices. Constructing activist cultures that recognize the complexity and multidirectionality of power, the multiplicity of axes of oppression, and the implication of all subjects in relations of domination is essential to building liberatory potential and circumventing repressive tendencies that reappear continually in all political movements. Cultivating movements that are capable of self-critique and renovation combats the reproduction of oppression and contributes to pre-figuring the more egalitarian social relations which the movement envisions for the world.

²³See Connell and Messerschmidt 2005 for review of the history and reformulation of the concept of hegemonic masculinity.

²⁴Corporate power is, of course, widely recognized and referenced, as is imperial power, the relation between the two and their capitalist character. However, the class and national origin of leading activists in the WSF is not problematized beyond the occasional acknowledgement of the over-representation of Latin Americans and Europeans. There is hardly any discourse of race or racism in the WSF. To the extent that gender and (to a lesser degree) sexuality are in play, it is due to the persistent efforts of feminists.

Ongoing work of this kind is central to building enduring alliances across difference, especially those marked by historical inequalities.

Conclusion

Most commentators readily situate the WSF in relationship to the anti-globalization movement that coalesced in Seattle. Far fewer acknowledge the founding presence of feminism and its deep and ongoing influence in the WSF and on the wider anti-globalization terrain. According to Virginia Vargas, leading Latin American feminist and activist with *Articulación Feminista Marcosur*:

The WSF represents a dialectical articulation between the global justice movement and the feminist movement in particular. This articulation is not easy; it implies a double strategy for feminisms of committing themselves to collective struggles of the social movements while also transforming their perspectives in relation to feminism, gender, difference and multiplicity. (Vargas 2003b: 34–35, citing Corrêa 2002: 69)

Through this article, I have attempted to make visible this saturating feminist presence, to distill its knowledges, and begin to appreciate their importance and effects on the anti-globalization terrain beyond feminism itself. I have argued that despite the presence of diverse and competing feminist projects and the highly contested character of feminism as a vision and practice of social transformation as evident in the WSF, there is a body of feminist knowledges accumulated over decades of practice in a world-wide movement, that is circulating widely, that enjoys wide acceptance among diverse feminisms, and which they carry into their collaborations in the anti-globalization milieu. This is not to claim that feminism is all-knowing, that the feminist discourses at the WSF or more generally are adequate in and of themselves, nor to claim that feminist knowledges are superior to those of other movements. However, it is to recognize and begin to analyze the cross-fertilizations that are underway on the anti-globalization terrain and to recognize feminism's distinct and open-ended contributions to this process.

Aside from their substantive content as outlined above, feminist knowledges on the anti-globalization terrain share a number of characteristics. These flow, I think, from the widespread embrace by feminists across the spectrum of an epistemology of partial, situated and positional knowledges. Feminists thus do not seek to hegemonize the feminist field, in neither its political practices nor its knowledge claims. There is likewise no impulse among feminists to hegemonize the WSF nor the anti-globalization terrain more broadly. In a dialogical fashion, many feminisms in the WSF are seeking to influence the whole range of movements - to have them knit feminist agendas into and alongside their own. At the same time, feminists remain resolutely conscious of the specificity of their own movement and do not presume to speak for an imagined whole that is the global justice movement. In ways that resound with feminist approaches

more generally, the feminist discourses arising from the WSF are located in and produced from self-consciously partial perspectives.

The feminist knowledges encountered through this study all are rooted in practice; they embrace pluralism, they are non-hegemonic and they work through and across difference. Feminists recognize and valorize a pluralism of analyses and strategies among themselves and among the movements. The multiplicity of subjects and struggles produces plural and diverse knowledges of the world and discourses of politics. Critical engagement with difference, arising from social diversity and political pluralism, is at the center of their political projects and their proposals for the WSF. In this, there is a powerful convergence between all feminist currents and the WSF as a political project.

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