6 Making waste (in)visible at the Dakar World Social Forum

A Goffmanian perspective on a transnational alter-global gathering

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Abstract

In this contribution, we look at waste management techniques at the Dakar 2011 World Social Forum and the different tactics deployed to preserve the façade of a clean, environmentally conscious, and organized transnational alter-global gathering. By using a theatrical metaphor, we take into account the way in which organizers of the Dakar WSF have attempted to present this international alter-global event to activists, media and other participants, the ways in which they have tried to guide and control the impression formed on the event, and the types of activities and techniques employed to sustain their performance before participants.

“Prepare yourself for chaos,” said a seventy-year-old German activist when he learned that, like most activities planned for the day, the classroom where he was supposed to attend a workshop on the “Jasmine revolution” was occupied by Senegalese first-year university students who were in the middle of their first-semester law examination.1 The unavailability of classrooms and the absence of updated information on campus at the Université Cheikh Anta Diop (UCAD) of Dakar for the activities of the first

1 This type of comment (or other kinds of remarks, such as “It is a very irresponsible attitude by the organizers, the trip to come here was very expensive!” – Herrera’s field notes on February 6, 2011), were quite common from the early hours of the Dakar World Social Forum as tensions arose days before between the UCAD Board of Education and the WSF Local Organizing Committee preventing access to over 100 rooms throughout the campus for workshops. These remarks were later on reinstated by the Working Group in charge of the evaluation of the Dakar Forum Event: “Dakar was a disaster for the individuals that participated; they spent a lot of resources to get there and were lost most of the time. The forum failed for those thousands of individuals. Networks fared much better, because of word of mouth or self-organization.” At the same time, the participants’ improvised self-organizing abilities were praised, particularly in this chaotic context. WSF International Council, Evaluation Dakar Forum Event, in: http://openfsm.net/projects/ic-methodology/wsf11-evaluation-synthesis.
day of the 2011 World Social Forum (WSF) created feelings of confusion and discomfort among participants. These feelings would worsen on the second day, as most classrooms were still unavailable for WSF activities. By the third and fourth day, it was the arrival of dozens of Senegalese street vendors on the campus main arteries that caught the attention of participants. Wooden statues, T-shirts and other local items contributed to a colorful, Senegalese-impregnated décor. By the fifth day, the forum was reaching its climax; the Assembly of Social Movements gathered together most of the participants and representatives of local and international organizations, where they tried to plan the next stages of their respective transnational mobilizations. Parallel to this fervent activist activity, disposal piles grew near the borders of the UCAD campus, far away from the main stages of the WSF.

While some authors consider the World Social Forum and its regional manifestations as a laboratory to explore transnational activism (Smith et al., 2007; Agrikoliansky and Sommier, 2005), we can also view the WSF as a material and symbolic universe in itself with its own practices and representations of social and militant activity. In line with this perspective, in this contribution we will be looking at waste management techniques at the Dakar 2011 World Social Forum and the different tactics deployed to preserve the façade of a clean, environmentally conscious, and organized transnational alter-global gathering. Using Erving Goffman’s theatrical metaphor (Goffman, 1959), we will take into account how the organizers of the Dakar WSF attempted to present this international alter-global event to activists, media, and other participants, the ways in which they tried to guide and control the impression formed at and of the event, and the types of activities and techniques employed to sustain their performance before participants.

Few insights can be extracted on the way the specific issue of waste disposal was handled, actually used and sometimes criticized by multiple actors intervening as spectators, performers, or directors of what could be considered the World Social Forum as a “public stage” of the alter-

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2 For a general presentation of the WSF as a public stage of the Global Justice Movement or alter-global movement, see Rucht (2011: 19). “Major gatherings such as congresses, jamborees, and mass protests, whether contentious or not, help to create and sustain social movements. In such gatherings, the adherents of a social movement physically meet with two aims: They first send a message to the outer world, making it aware of their existence, worldviews, demands and activities. To this end, slogans are formulated, keynote-speakers selected, journalists invited, and media-oriented events staged to demonstrate the strength and vitality of movement. Gatherings thus serve primarily as public stages. Less obviously, these gatherings also aim at strengthening internal bonds by permitting activists to talk to one another, exchange experiences, bridge cleavages, and express solidarity.”
global movement. In this case, to analyze waste management practices in an activist space, we need to consider the local material conditions that play a role in the development of this transnational contentious gathering (Pommerolle and Siméant, 2011). Also, we strongly believe that the lack of attention and research on waste, in other words its *invisibility*, should be taken into account. As Honor Fagan puts it: “[waste] is usually invisible (mostly hidden), deemed unproductive and certainly not well researched” (Fagan, 2002: 5).

Nevertheless, studying waste management practices may allow us to unveil some hidden aspects of the WSF. The sociology of social movements should also have alternative entry points to their object of study. Indeed, bins, waste dumps, and waste-related objects are not noble *per se*, but in contrast to the official and overconstructed face of activist activities, they are still especially invested by activism at large. Observing waste enables us to shed light on these dichotomies. We should also keep in mind the hard challenge posed by waste management in a context where the resources are scarce and also unequally distributed between the heterogeneous landscape of organizations participating in the event. Thus, the difficulties encountered by the organizers will not be considered here as failures or flaws, but rather as revealing some asymmetries, which contribute to shape the WSF.

6.1 Waste management as stage-setting for a transnational alter-global event

First, one should look at the way the *façade* of the WSF was designed through the example of waste management conceived as a specific scene of the global *staging* of the alter-global movement. Therefore our analysis will focus on three main points: after a brief overview of what seems to be a *public issue* in Dakar, we will try to describe how the waste problem was conceived and integrated into the *staging* of the WSF. Finally, we will illustrate how waste management was actually set up within the UCAD campus according to our observations during the investigation.}

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3 “Sociology treats ‘waste’ as if it was literally immaterial, as if it existed in a world apart from the one we inhabit in our daily, routine lives” (O’Brien, 1999).
4 Our sincere thanks to Marie-Emmanuelle Pommerolle and Johanna Siméant for their insightful comments on earlier drafts of this chapter.
5 For this contribution, we rely on some tools of the ethnographic approach as a way to examine international activists and local organizers in action and to explore the dispositions, incentives, and skills these groups of actors attach to waste management practices, which is a
Waste management remains a recurrent problem not only in UCAD, but also in the city of Dakar as a whole. In the first decade of the 21st century, several actors shared this policy sector, among them two departments of the central state – the Ministry of Environment (Ministère de l’Environnement) and the Ministry of Culture, Gender and Quality of Life (Ministère de la Culture, du Genre et du Cadre de vie) –, private companies, and local authorities. A multi-million-dollar project financed by the World Bank and implemented by an Italian company started in 2005 to improve the situation in the Senegalese capital but was abruptly ended by the government in 2007. Recent attempts to reform its governance led to the foundation of a new public-driven organization created in 2006: the APROSEN (Agence Nationale pour la Propreté au Sénégal). Then, a consultation process led to the creation of a public-driven company in the summer of 2011, the SOPROSEN (Société pour la Propreté du Sénégal), which was empowered with responsibility for waste management throughout the country. But this structure coexists with regional-level agencies, like the Entente Cadak-Car, which was operating across the entire provincial territory.

This institutional turmoil was punctuated by recurrent struggles such as the conflict between local authorities and the state over the devolution of powers in this specific policy area. We should also mention the 2010 controversy over the contract binding the French firm Veolia and the Dakar town hall, denounced as unfair by 19 Senegalese companies. The waste management market in Dakar was valued at 10 billion CFA (about 15 million euros) in 2010. But one should also note the mobilizations of waste workers, especially during the WSF where they complained about their wages and status within the reform. Furthermore, the FUTN union (Front Unitaire des Travailleurs du Nettoiement) threatened to strike if the authorities ignored their claims. Thus, the organizing committees of the upcoming WSF in Dakar faced a complex situation with fickle support from the central authorities. This set of constraints has to be kept in mind to understand the local context in which WSF organizers had been working during the months of preparation for the event. But we should point out that this issue may particular aspect of activist life in a World Social Forum. In this way we try to address the “double absence: of politics in ethnographic literature and of ethnography in studies of politics” pointed out by Javier Auyero (2006: 258). For this kind of approach in the study of social mobilization, see also Wolford, 2006. For a discussion on the ethnographical approach in the study of social mobilization, see Combes et al., 2011.
also have been a critical one for local authorities, since it was an element at the core of the university’s reputation and by extension the renown of the entire capital city and even the country. In fact, a large part of the Senegalese economy relies on tourism, which is why the image of Dakar – along with other priorities like security – had to be preserved.⁶ Thus, it should be seen not only as a matter of staging the event – conceived as a purely autonomous scene produced by and dedicated to foreign activists – but also as a way to enclose it in the country.

Organizing a WSF is a complex, multi-leveled process in which various actors at the international, regional, and local levels have to cope with a number of logistical aspects in keeping with the internationally agreed organization standards issued by the World Social Forum International Council (IC) and the local resources available. In order to handle the multiplication and diversification of “social forums” around the globe, the IC adopted in 2008 the Guiding Principles for Organizing a World Social Forum Event⁷ as a means to set standard rules for designing and organizing this particular kind of activist performance. Among these jointly-defined principles, which include those of “participation” and “equality of access,” there are specific criteria for the choice of “the venue”, as special consideration needs to be given to “transportation to and from the venue, environmental conditions – plastic bags and bottles, overuse and misuse of paper, use of recyclable materials and so on, and levels of cleanliness and hygiene. It would be highly desirable to make the space for the duration of the event into a ‘common’, to which not just the organizing committee but all the participating organizations have a responsibility in manner of use, maintenance, and upkeep.”⁸

For organizers, particularly at the international level, the tangible aspects of setting up a World Social Forum are critical in order to show consistency in activist conduct between proclaimed principles and actual practices. For instance, throughout the preparation and evaluation of the two previous WSF editions in Nairobi and Belem, there were debates on how to set up the

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⁶ Touristic, economic, and commercial dimensions were also a part of the first World Social Forum organized in the African territory. In Nairobi in 2007, the organization of the World Social Forum was seen as an “economic opportunity” to promote local tourism for authorities, entrepreneurs – represented by Kenyan and transnational firms which partly financed the alter-global event – and local craftsmen (Pommerolle and Haeringer, 2012).

⁷ Adopted in a plenary session of the IC on September 24, 2008 in Copenhagen. These Principles are constantly being adapted in accordance with changing WSF organizational practices.

forum’s physical space and what this symbolizes in terms of the “alter-global ethos” (Audrain et al., 2008: 151). In Nairobi in 2007, scholars have pointed out that one of the main controversies throughout the event concerned the “commercialization” of the WSF, which in the eyes of international and local activists was perceived as a deviation from the “true nature” of World Social Forum space (Pommerolle and Haeringer, 2007). Furthermore, in 2009, the issue of the impact of this kind of event on the local environment was central in the discussions on how to preserve the façade of the event: “To avoid the contradiction of not respecting the environment in the Amazonia and be free of media criticism, the Organizing Committee and the IC should insert in the discussion of Methodology the impact of holding a WSF in Belem (airline travel, local pollution generated by transportation, trash produced by participants, impact on climate, reduce the usage of plastic and paper, and other environmental issues).”9 These concerns were followed up during the evaluation of the Belem WSF: “It’s important to ensure the coherence between theory and practice concerning ‘sustainability’. Issues related to waste disposal and recycling, resources conservation, transportation, territory planning, and others should be considered more seriously.”10

References to these “principles” were very common during the preparatory stages of the 2011 WSF, for which a subcommittee dedicated to waste was specifically constituted within the logistics committee. Reports of the preparatory meetings and seminars show that organizers were quite aware of the waste situation in UCAD and Dakar: “an ongoing effort to raise awareness regarding waste during the Forum is expected, to avoid its formation and to plan its sorting and disposal. The SOC [Senegalese Organization Committee] has been integrating garbage collectors and recyclers in the logistics committee in order to develop alternative options.”11 In this sense, the infrastructure and hygienic aspects of the organization were a key part

during the meetings held between the *Local Organization Committee* (LOC) and the Dakar authorities.\(^\text{12}\)

Waste management at the Dakar WSF had visible aspects (and other less visible as we shall see in the last section of this chapter) throughout the UCAD campus. During our fieldwork, we immediately encountered the “green garbage bins” which had been put up by the organizers in several areas of the campus. Here, let us take a walk through the main scenes of the event to describe briefly the impression given by the *official waste system* during the 2011 WSF. After entering the campus, the bins did not actually appear until we arrived in the surroundings of UCAD 2, the area of the university campus where most tents and villages of organizations and the press were concentrated. Then there were bins scattered in the alleys, which led to the roundabout between the Grand Podium and the Library, which was partially transformed into a Press Center. A few bins had also been set up in the surroundings of Brazil’s pavilion, which had its own system of waste disposal with black bins though without recycling instructions, and between the FST (*Faculté des Sciences et Techniques*) and the FSJP (*Faculté des Sciences Juridiques et Politiques*). But they had become few and far between compared with UCAD 2 near-military checkering and did not last the entire event. Furthermore, there was also a difference between UCAD 2, where bins were often paired with sorting instructions, and other areas, where they were put up as a single unit. Workshops and activities were most often organized in those areas, although the cancelations and disorganization could lead the participants to wander around other places less “prepared”. We also noticed that forum bins were not very visible during the opening day, and then their number grew quickly on the second and third days of the event to stabilize until the end of WSF.

Such observations led us to suggest that the concept of a *sensitizing device* proposed by Christophe Traïni (Traïni, 2010) might be useful to underline the role of material things and the layout of objects in the staging of the event. One should highlight the distribution of green garbage bins mostly in the UCAD 2 area, where the majority of organizations had set up their tents during the WSF. We will deal with this issue later (see last section of this chapter), but at this point we should nonetheless draw attention to several points. First, let us take a look at the color of the objects: these bins were similar to several others we had encountered in the city,

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\(^\text{12}\) “Note de rencontre avec la Mairie de Dakar,” August 31, 2010. A few informal interviews with Senegalese students and waste collectors revealed that the big alleys and the space dedicated to the tents had been cleaned up two months before the event.
but it seems they had been painted green for the occasion. Then, the presence of paper sheets indicated which objects should be recycled or not: on one hand, non-plastic items, and on the other, those made of plastic or aluminium. The standardization of these objects shows how organizers had been trying to convey techniques to sensitize the audiences regarding waste management.
Finally, certain organizations and their stands played an important part in reinforcing this environmentally friendly impression of the WSF stage, like the Dakar-based ENDA (Environnement et Développement du Tiers-Monde), one of the leading organizations concerned with waste management. It soon became clear as the forum unraveled that the Dakar WSF was to be a major space of dissemination for ENDA’s network. The leader of ENDA Maghreb, Tawfik Ben Abdallah, was one of the key members of the organizing committee, and will continue to be so, as the next WSF was in Tunis, home of ENDA Maghreb. ENDA, through an impressive web of different centers of activism, was thus at the core of organizing the forum. The headquarters of most of ENDA’s branches are in Dakar, and this organization has increasingly played a significant role in African alter-global movements. ENDA’s presence was visible throughout the forum, from the opening march with hundreds of banners to UCAD, with tents and material resources displayed across campus. Topics such as sustainable development, access to land, and waste management are at the core of ENDA activism.

ENDA Ecopole, one of the major branches of the regional NGO, is specifically concerned with waste and recycling practices, and has been involved with the Dakar dump for decades. During the Dakar WSF, ENDA Ecopole highlighted the concern given to waste management during the preparation phase. Its stand was one of the most visible ones upon entering the formal grounds of the WSF. Not only was the stand very colorful, but also clean and well equipped. The inside of the tent was covered with educational posters on electronic waste and the Mbeubeuss dump of Dakar; they had publications (free and for sale), and at least one member of the organization was present at all times. Thus, this organization could not be ignored as a part of the staging at the core of this paper. Indeed, ENDA Ecopole had planned to organize two workshops on waste management. However, only one entitled Electronic Solidarity and Waste Platform (Plateforme Solidarité Numérique et Déchets) occurred on Wednesday, February 8th. It took place at the local UCAD Internet cafe, where all modern technologies and comfort were available (computers, sound system, projectors, seats and tables for all participants, air-conditioning, etc.). Many different speakers (from Senegal, France, and Colombia) were scheduled, including representatives from the Senegalese government, UCAD, NGOs, and waste-pickers. As the workshop was focusing on electronic waste and reducing the digital gap, there was a strong normative conflict among the various speakers. On the one hand, there were the representatives of formal institutions, such as the government and UCAD, who advocated the formal establishment of the Mbeubeuss dump, waste disposal, and recycling practices, the fight
against illegal import of waste and the reduction and better management of waste. On the other hand, there were the representatives of the pickers, and waste-related NGOs such as ENDA Ecopole, who advocated maintaining the status quo, i.e. protecting the waste-picker profession and empowering local actors in waste management processes. However, what was striking was the common stage face they all shared. As performers, they tacitly agreed to hold a common ground on the idea that they were all working together. The mise-en-scène of the representative of the Mbeubeuss Pickers’ Union, with a very emotionally and politically driven speech, added to the construction of a common ideology of waste. One of UCAD representatives mentioned the case of the campus, and the problems encountered in waste management and treatment, but this was the only link that was made in a four-hour workshop between waste in general and waste at the WSF.

The next morning, ENDA Ecopole organized a visit of the Mbeubeuss dump for partner NGO members, journalists (BBC Africa and Croatian television), and two researchers (including one of the authors of this contribution). The visit or more precisely tour of the dump was very well orchestrated. Not only did the participants have to follow unquestioningly all instructions (such as the prohibition of photographs or video recording and the strict requirement to stay on the path planned for the tour), but the discourses of both the Pickers’ Union representative and the members of ENDA Ecopole were identical to those of the workshop and previous journalistic visits of the dump. The analysis of both the workshop and the Mbeubeuss tour demonstrates a strong inclination on the part of NGOs and their partners to set forth and transpose a particular discourse on waste. This discourse is not, however, linked to any practical organizational matters, such as the management of waste at the forum. There is a gap between the staged discourses on waste and the actual presence of its performers within an activist forum, where waste also matters. This gap reflects one of the broader debates within the transnational environmentalist movement(s). For many years, deep ecologists have tried to prove that nature and the environment should be at the top of all political agendas. Development advocates, on the other hand, have argued that some forms of environmentalism harm the poorer of the world (Wenz, 2007). Thus social justice movements and environmentalism have clashed over issues such as waste management, with the former arguing against the dispossession of waste-pickers and the latter arguing for the formalization of dumps.

13 Video dated from 2008 from the Canadian International Development Research Centre, accessible on web.idrc.ca/fr/ev-133936-201-1-DO_TOPIC.html.
This gap often represents the overwhelmingly present divide between the North and South discourses of transnational environmentalism: it involves not only the question of historical responsibility for pollution, but also the present cases of “individual lifestyles of activists being at variance with ecological principles” (Kothari, 1996: 159). Furthermore, as these seemingly contrary ideologies of social and environmental justice on the one hand, and deep ecology on the other, reach a common ground, the issue of the place of ecology in social movements has become primordial. Indeed, environmental issues in a broader sense were at the center of most debates during the Dakar WSF. However, as justly pointed out by Kothari more than a decade ago, there is still a disconnect between transnational ecological discourse and practice (Kothari, 1996).

6.2 Audiences

This second section will look at the actual settings and audiences of the WSF regarding waste uses and management. Here we use the terms “settings” and “audiences” as Goffman defines them, i.e. the public and the place where human action takes place (Goffman, 1959: 22). However, the forum form also implies that the actors/performers and the public are part of the same group, the audience in general terms. Also, as we will explain further in the next section, the formal setting or stage where the interactions take place is well defined and exclusive. The allocated space for the forum, the visible and legitimate stage for interaction, is itself divided into defined stages and audience terrains.

With regard to these basic assumptions about waste in the forum, garbage-related objects, whether bins, disposal piles, and handicrafts made of recycled waste or stray waste can be considered as props: they are part of the décor, the setting. Within the material culture of protest, these objects are used to enact and convey diverse social meanings (O’Brien, 1999). The particular use of special World Social Forum bins, made of half barrels and painted green with black writing, illustrates this argument. In a sense, the participants at a forum will adapt their actions regarding waste, and especially waste disposal, to the setting they are in. On stage, they tend to follow the rules of the land, that is, to use the bin-props that are available. Backstage they are more likely to follow and use other rules and props when it comes to waste. The idea here is not to generalize about behavior or modes of action, because of the immense diversity of participants and stages within the forum setting, but rather to shed light on some patterns detected
while observing relationships to waste. As soon as the “official” WSF bins appeared on the forum as well as paper signs indicating the “proper” fates of different types of waste – also known as recycling –, it was observed that participants tended to follow (without question) the instructions. Whether or not the waste was to be “properly” disposed of and recycled was not a preoccupation; the concern was rather to follow the rules of waste disposal.

Normatively, bins are used to dispose of waste and garbage, and these were the appropriate/legitimate purposes planned for these objects. In this sense, bins were mostly found at strategic places such as food outlets, resting spots (stairs, building entrances, grassy areas, etc.), or next to major stands or alleyways. What was not planned was the possibility for alternative or, in other words, inappropriate/illegitimate, uses of these green metallic containers. Here, bins are not only part of the décor, but can be considered as props, tools to carry out human interactions. In this particular case, several alternative uses were observed. The first, and quite frequent one, was the use of bins as seats during workshops or performances. The immense lack of material resources and organization at the forum led to a scramble for any piece of furniture (or, as in the case here, non-furniture) by the participants and organizations present. One of the representatives of the small French NGO Solidarité had to stay permanently at her stand during the first two days in order to secure her one and only chair and some planks of wood.\footnote{Informal chat between Alice Judell and Maëlle Bouvier from Solidarité.}

Another alternative use of bins was as blocking material. During the second and third days of the forum, the local student movement of ‘non-oriented’ alumni grew in both visibility and importance. They were protesting against the lack of student positions at the university where the forum took place.\footnote{Cf. Herrera and Paule’s field notes on February 8, 2011. The first student protest during the WSF took place around 2 p.m. while we were looking for the site of a conference that we never found. We were asking for directions from students or lost fellow activists when we heard some sort of crowd roaring inside the campus. A few minutes later, we were able to locate about 30–40 students who were demonstrating in the big alley in front of the library and heading to the University Rectorate. Followed by a European journalist with a video camera, the group was asking for “orientation” and described itself as a group of alumni prevented by the university administration from registering as proper students.} Their arguments were therefore outside of the forum sphere but better heard within it. While marching, they used the bins and waste that were available to blockade the main alleys leading to the library. The use of these bin-props, objects branded WSF, was a very material demonstration of improvised and unforeseen protest at this “activist theater” (Audrain and Pommerolle, 2008: 180). Not only did these young protesters integrate
the forum’s stage to further their message, but they also used the available props, its material symbols.

Another use of the bins was as a souvenir. During the forum, all forum-branded objects, such as T-shirts, bags, banners, and bins, were very much sought after by mostly local but also international participants at the forum. On the third day of the forum, one of the authors was able to purchase a WSF bag at a recently opened, informal stand behind UCAD 2. The vendor had many WSF-branded objects and was turning a large profit. The sale of bins was not witnessed, but during the days immediately following the forum, some participants and locals took bins, whether to use them as flowerpots or fire barrels or simply as souvenirs. Later on, after the forum, the bins were piled up in corners of the campus, but also reused as garbage cans for other events within the university. Indeed a Google conference took place several days later and the bins were reused for that event.

Illustration 6.2  Bins piled up after the WSF

Other spaces in the forum setting were allocated to exhibitions and the sale of handicrafts made from or inspired by waste-related objects, reinforcing a material culture of protest specific to the African alter-global movement, which was manifest at the Dakar WSF. Let us note here that the use of

16  Post-WSF observations by the authors.
recycled plastic containers to make African-style masks illustrated two processes that were present at this forum. The first relates to the social and material construction of African identity and unity at the forum using symbols of “Africa” as it is perceived in the rest of the world – such as the “voodoo” myth of the African mask. The second is related to waste and to the fight for the preservation of an informal economy based on garbage as it takes place in most African dump sites today (see section 1 on the Mbeubeuss dump). Also the presence of artifacts made of recycled objects demonstrates the importance of informal economies in tourism-related trade. Indeed, handicrafts made from informally recycled waste have become a souvenir trade throughout most of the African continent. This denotes the intention of organizers and participants to place the importance of informal and solidarity-based economies dependent on recycling and waste at the center of the forum (both geographically and thematically).

While the audience itself – in other words, the participants – at the WSF was highly diverse and prompted by varied motives, the state of the global environment represented a recurring feature of interest. Indeed, in relation to the environmental issue, the statistical data collected throughout the forum for this project indicates that almost one quarter of all participants questioned declared that they were or had been an active or passive member of an environmental group or organization.\(^{17}\) However, when asked which debate or topic they considered the most compelling so far at the WSF, only 35 interviewees out of 1,070 mentioned the environment.\(^{18}\) More surprisingly, only one participant mentioned waste management as an issue in a comment on electric and electronic waste management.\(^{19}\) Thus, although the state of the environment seemed to be an important preoccupation during the staging of the WSF, pollution and environmental degradation appeared to be treated as a secondary matter at the individual level for the participants responding to the survey. Moreover, the total absence of comments on waste management at the forum in the questionnaires collected could indicate that the fate of waste immediately after consumption was taken for granted (the act of disposing

\(^{17}\) Out of 1,070 participants questioned, 150 declared they were active members of an environmental organization, 58 passive members, and 38 declared having been members in the past.

\(^{18}\) The broader environmental issues were mentioned as “climate change(s), “sustainable development”, “ecology”, “environment”, “environmental justice”, “pollution”, “desertification”, “biodiversity”, “climate”, “CO2”, “Rio +20”, “climate justice” and “waste.”

\(^{19}\) It should be noted that this participant filled out the questionnaire during the aforementioned workshop by ENDA, and declared himself as working for the Institute for Environmental Sciences of Dakar.
waste in a bin and/or separating waste into different bins) as an on-stage rule, but the ultimate destiny of waste produced by the WSF after it left the stage did not seem to be of interest. In other words, even if the analysis of the statistical data collected does not allow us to go further on this matter, we submit the hypothesis that waste management can be viewed as a “suppressed activity” in the Dakar WSF activist space, as opposed to
other “manifest activities” such as the eagerly-awaited Assembly of Social Movements. This management of activities – whether they are manifest or suppressed – allows us to go through the looking glass by questioning the invisible backstage of the forum related to the visible on-stage activist space.

6.3 Backstage tactics and the boundaries of an institutionalized activist space

Alongside the fervent activist activity during the six days of the WSF, disposal piles grew on the edges of the UCAD campus, particularly in three areas that went unnoticed by most participants: near UCAD 2 where most of the organization tents were set up, between students’ residences behind the Faculté de Lettres et Sciences Humaines (around the Hallway of Death – le Couloir de la mort) and behind the Faculté de Sciences et Techniques. However, the main areas seemed relatively clean in spite of the mass presence of activists, street vendors, and UCAD students. Waste management techniques during the WSF worked in such a way that most of the trash collected from garbage bins was later piled up essentially in these “invisible” places where individual garbage collectors would select certain items before burning the disposal piles.

We mentioned earlier that by arranging green garbage bins along specific areas of the UCAD campus and stressing recycling practices, organizers sought to establish the initial ideal setting for this type of transnational gathering in order to raise awareness about waste disposal as a routine during the event. Nevertheless, at the Dakar 2011 World Social Forum, some aspects of militant activity were accentuated, such as workshops, assemblies, and protest marches, while others were “suppressed,” such as drinking beer or

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21 Goffman mentions the importance of the “initial definition of the situation” projected by an individual, which tends to provide a “plan for the cooperative activity that follows.” In this case, the cooperative activity relied on the use by WSF participants of green bins to throw away garbage and even to sort garbage into specific bins for plastic or non-plastic objects. In the end, even if the recycling practices were not always respected, the content of the bins would be mixed up later on “backstage” as plastic and non-plastic waste were a part of the same disposal piles.
waste management techniques.\textsuperscript{22} Broadly speaking, the spatial dimension of the WSF offered us a few examples of this division, as some places were actually excluded from the physical stage, such as the so-called “refugee camp,” which gathered various caravans of participants coming from nearby African countries. This appellation was used by the travelers themselves to denounce the harsh conditions – extreme exposure to the sun, lack of latrines and sanitation, etc. – they were experiencing in the football field belonging to the Ecole Supérieure Polytechnique (ex-ENSUT) where many of the tents were set up. Thus, while some caravanners and fellow activists criticized the lack of preparation and poor organization of the WSF, some of them denounced this relegation as politically motivated. Furthermore, they stigmatized northern NGOs for renting expensive hotel rooms, holding private events and excluding \textit{de facto} less endowed participants. In stark contrast to the caravanners, another example of backstage tactics drew our attention: the majority of Brazilian participants had been gathering in

\textsuperscript{22} It was rare to see participants drinking beer on the main stages of the WSF, even though it was a common “activity” which took place in the less visible refreshment areas.
Dakar’s Goethe Institute where they organized their workshops and other activities. Thus they did not experience the same level of chaos and disorientation that shaped the first few days for most WSF participants. Moreover, they remained quite secluded during most of the week, as the Institute was located outside the campus area. Both of these examples highlight the different uses of the backstage and how it shaped the boundaries of WSF. On the one hand, the “refugee camp” was relegated to the southern end of the campus as the only option offered to the travelers by the organizing committee, generating exclusion and resentment towards what appeared to be the *showcase* of the event. On the other hand, some participants chose to organize themselves in *havens*, far from the widespread chaos on the main stage. Thus, backstage tactics should be seen not only as a covert means of exclusion, but also as a technique used by participants with a larger set of resources who could afford to *leave the scene*.

The map below shows the distribution of the areas where manifest and suppressed activities took place during the Dakar WSF. The white rectangles and grey circles represent the visible areas: the former indicate the main stages for activist performance, while the latter designate leisure areas where participants ate local dishes or enjoyed a traditional *Toubá* coffee. The black dotted lines mark the *back region* or *backstage* areas of this transnational gathering where suppressed aspects of WSF activity were concentrated.23 In this scenario, hiding waste in backstage areas served as a tactic to control the impression the participants receive of the WSF, among other stage management techniques during activist performances (workshops, assemblies and any other kind of activist encounter).

These aspects were concealed to most participants as a technique employed by the Local Organizing Committee to guide and control the façade of a clean, well-organized space. In other words, waste was hidden so that the audience would not be able to see the treatment of this aspect of WSF activity in comparison with the treatment one would expect from the organizers of a World Social Forum, especially in view of the aforementioned *Guiding Principles for Organizing WSF Events*. Indeed, to render the waste management techniques visible would have given an inconsistent impression of what a WSF should be.24 By making waste invisible, organizers set

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23 According to Goffman (1959: 114), the back region is the “place, relative to a given performance, where the impression fostered by the performance is knowingly contradicted as a matter of course.”

24 The Guiding Principles, along with the WSF Charter of Principles from 2001, are one of the texts often invoked to remind organizers of the specificity of a social forum and to maintain, in Goffman’s terms, “regional behavior” at an activist alter-global transnational gathering. Political
the stage for a type of information game by concealing elements of the transnational activist event such as waste and disposal piles and revealing legitimate elements of *décor* like garbage bins and leaving free areas for participants’ artistic expression out of waste and recycled material such as sculptures.

By stocking trash at the ends of the places where the activist performance was presented, waste management practices formed the *boundaries* of the activist space. However, our focus here was not to analyze the indigenous scientist Lilian Matthieu (2012: 89) emphasizes that invoking a set of texts is a practice that marks out the boundary of “social movement space” – in this case alter-globalization space.
debate on the WSF as being an “open space” in the sense of allowing different kinds of organizations to join the alter-global organizational dynamic. In this chapter, we have seen the WSF from two angles: first as a space that physically constrains the participants to elaborate their performance and second, as an institutionalized activist space with a set of practices, roles, and representations that are continuously transmitted, reproduced, and improvised in the alter-global transnational arena, from social forum to social forum, as a result of interactions mostly between the WSF IC and Local Organizing Committees. By examining the concrete aspects of waste management at the Dakar World Social Forum, we see how in the end local material conditions and activists’ practices are used to mark out the “material space of mobilization” (Combes et al., 2011: 21), confining and authorizing activists’ actions and their representations of those actions, which are at the core of sustaining and perpetuating the alter-global ethos.