Dear Sujit Lahiry:

I have received your inquiries concerning WOMP. I am living in California these days, and do not have materials that might be helpful in your studies. I will try to find some items that may be of interest, and send them to you from Princeton when I return there next week.

Let me give brief answers to your very difficult questions:

1. Origins: WOMP originated in the late 1960s, with the first serious meeting taking place in New Delhi, hosted by Rajni Kothari. The original idea was to explore visions of a preferred world order from various perspectives that were important at that time: USA, USSR, India, Japan, China, Latin America, Africa, Europe. The idea was that such visions would reflect the diverse circumstances of culture, economic development, political ideology that existed in different parts of the world. Such diverse perspectives, best collected in a volume of essays edited by Saul Mendlovitz under the title PREFERRED WORLDS FOR THE 1990s. Each of the main participants also agreed to work out their ideas for global reform in a separate volume, and each author was supposed to be advised by a regional group of notable individuals. The hope was to overcome the bad name of a Western-oriented tradition of one-world or world government proposals. There were many creative tensions in the group reflecting world tensions, as well. WOMP evolved over the years, with the benefit of meetings all over the world, and collaboration and friendship among the leading participants.

As a second stage, an effort was made to shift from diverse perspectives on world order to a consensus document. I was designated as the rapporteur of such an undertaking, which produced stimulating discussion and much contention. It was finally agreed, the final product should be published under my name bearing the title ON HUMANE GOVERNANCE: A NEW APPROACH TO GLOBAL POLITICS.
As a third stage, with a greater effort to involve younger scholars, emphasis shifted to the agency role of civil society actors, new social movements, and the tensions between localism and globalism, as well as emerging issues of identity. The chief product of this period was a small volume written by R.B.J. Walker entitled ONE WORLD/MANY WORLDS. There was also in this period an edited volume by Walker and Mendlovitz. I published my own book on these issues under the title EXPLORATIONS AT THE EDGE OF TIME.

2. Success of WOMP: It depends on how success is measured. As a project to change the world, it failed. As a project to influence the climate of opinion and elites, it is hard to say; there were indications of influence in the early period of Gorbachev leadership in the Soviet Union, and possibly in the approaches taken by some Latin American countries; also, the challenge in academic circles to realism was definitely helped by WOMP and its plea for a normative approach to the study and practice of international relations. It is also true that for the scholars involved the project was a success in shaping their own evolving outlook and research agenda. It continued for more than 30 years despite the logistical problems of organizing global meetings on low budgets and raising the funds needed.

3. Present opportunities for WOMP: There is a current attempt to bring WOMP back to life under the leadership of John Fousek at Rutgers University. The objective circumstances of near nuclear war in South Asia and the global war on terror, as well as persisting poverty and global warming, suggest the importance of alternative thinking at this time. May be WOMP is not the right label. Probably, a new generation should rise to the challenge. We need visions of a humane future and transition strategies to bridge the gap from here to there.

I have tried as best I could in a brief space to answer your core questions. If I am able I will send you some additional materials.

I wish you well with this research.

Sincerely,

Richard Falk

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