

**Is the global justice movement colonial?
Initiating a study of indigenous positionality
at the World Social Forum**

by
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**Paper prepared for the 2010 Canadian Political Science Association Annual Meeting,
Concordia University, Montreal, PQ, 3 June 2010.**

**DRAFT
Not for circulation or citation.
Comments welcome.**

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Indigenous peoples' defense of their lands, rights, and claims to self-determination involve them in front-line struggle against multi-national corporations, capitalist states, and international financial institutions. Not surprisingly then, indigenous networks have been consistently present in 'anti-globalization' events and protests. However, despite what appear to be objective grounds for mutual understanding and alliance-building, indigenous discourses and world views appear to be quite marginal in the global justice movement. I have recently begun a research project is to investigate whether and why this is so, the ways this divide between indigenous and non-indigenous perspectives might be bridged in practice, and the lessons this holds for relations between indigenous and non-indigenous peoples in political communities at various scales. I am interested to explore three inter-related dimensions: 1. the modernist ontologies of the emancipatory politics of the global left and their implications for reinscribing relations of coloniality with indigenous peoples/movements (among other non-moderns); 2. the presence and expression of traditional indigenous ontologies in the AGM and their contributions for reimagining global justice; 3. the possibilities for a non-dominating dialogue, mutual intelligibility and collaboration across the indigenous/non-indigenous ontological divide in the AGM.

I am pursuing this through a case study of the participation of indigenous networks at the World Social Forum (WSF). Since its inception in 2001, the World Social Forum regularly convenes more than 100,000 people in an annual global gathering and tens of thousands more in related regional events. The Social Forum is "an innovation of the anti-globalization movement" (Leite) in assembling groups and movements of global civil society in an open and non-deliberative space in which they self-organize: build networks, develop campaigns, and communicate their struggles to one another. Participating groups are broadly convergent in their opposition to neoliberal globalization but are otherwise stunningly diverse. The WSF is the preeminent site at which to observe the range of critical social movements active in the world today and the interactions among them.

My preoccupation here is not with the immense and multi-faceted global social forum phenomenon which has been the focus of much of my work. Rather, I am focused here on the (changing) positionality of self-identified indigenous movements in the Americas with respect to the WSF over a ten-year period in relation to the world-scale events that have taken place in Brazil (2001, 2002, 2003, 2005, and 2009). In this initial paper, my primary goal is to construct a provisional 'history' of indigneous participation in the WSFs in Brazil. I have done this primarily through interviews with key indigenous organizers and key people on the IC. I have also drawn on some primary documents of the International Council and of the relevant indigenous organizations and on the few secondary, mostly journalistic sources that exist. Overall, this attempt is grounded in my own participant-observation and attention to these quesitons at the WSF and at the hemispheric Social Fora in the Americas since 2002.

Focused research on these questions was undertaken through field work at World Social Forum events in the Americas in 2008-09, particularly the Americas Social Forum in Guatemala City in October 2008, and the WSF in Belém, Brazil in January 2009. This is the first paper emerging from this project and represents very initial work-in-progress. Here I will review some relevant literatures on the global politics of resistance in political science and suggest an alternative analytic, emerging in Latin American studies, by which to approach the central

questions of modernity and coloniality and which has informed my perspective on this project. I will then construct a brief history of indigenous peoples' encounter with the anti-globalization movement through the Social Forum process towards identifying some problematics for further research and analysis.

Any research dealing with indigenous peoples by a non-indigenous researcher raises ethical questions about who designs, controls, and is served by the research (Smith, L. T., 1999). My interest in this project is the foregrounding indigenous stories, analyses and perspectives in the service of building solidarity among non-indigenous movements for indigenous peoples' survival and rights. I have focused on indigenous issues in teaching since 2002, first in a partnership program between Ryerson and the First Nations Technical Institute (FNTEI) and now Aboriginal Studies at Brock University. I have also been active with the Toronto-based Coalition for Indigenous Sovereignty, which emerged to support the land reclamation at Six Nations, and with similar efforts to support First Nations communities like Grassy Narrows, Ardoch Algonquin and KI in their resisting prospecting, mining, forestry and other forms of resource extraction and environmental damage on their territories.

Some relevant literatures in Political Science

Since the end of the Cold War, ushered in through a series of non-violent "people power" revolutions in Eastern Europe, there has been an exploding interest in civil-society actors and their role in global politics (Mendlovitz and Walker 1988; Lynch 1998; Shaw 1994; Eschle and Stammers 2004; Waterman 2002; Boli and Thomas 1999; Stammers 1999 Stavenhagen, 1997). In particular, a series of UN conferences in the 1990s gave new visibility to transnational social movements and advocacy networks, particularly those emerging around human rights, environmental, women's and indigenous peoples' movements (Wapner 1996; Kamieniecki 1993; Keck and Sikkink 1998; Steinstra 2000; West 1999; Lipschutz 1996; Cohen and Rai 2000 Brysk, 1994; Miguashca, 1996). These became the focus of scholarly work on the emergence of a global civil society (Edwards and Gaventa 2001; Anheier, et.al.2001; Glasius, et.al. 2002; Keane 2003; Friedman, et.al. 2005; Foster and Anand 1999; Colás 2002; Guidry, et.al. 2000; Scholte 2002; Batliwala 2006; Germain and Kenny 2005), the possibility of cosmopolitan democracy (Held 1991; Held, et.al. 1999; Archibuchi and Held 1995; Linklater 2002; Beck 2000) and prospects for global governance (Meyer and Prugl 1999; Falk 1995; Khagram, et.al. 2002; O'Brien, et.al. 2000; Clapp 2005). A related political science/sociology literature on "contentious politics" began to engage transnationalism with growing relevance and overlap for IR (Smith, et.al. 1997; Smith and Johnston 2002; Bandy and Smith 2005; Della Porta, et al. 2006; Tarrow 2001, 2005; Della Porta and Tarrow 2005). New institutionalist work on interest groups, NGOs, and alliance building in relation to specific policy areas such as trade and foreign policy began to appear (Florini, 2003; Scholte, 1999; Smythe and Smith, 2006).

In the post-Cold War period, scholars increasingly addressed globalization, specifically processes of economic restructuring and the resistances they were engendering (Mander and Goldsmith 2001; Rupert 2000; Sklair 2002; Held and McGrew 2002; Mittelman 2004; Held 2004; Shaw 1999; Gill 2003; Stiglitz 2006; Cox 2002; Drainville 2004; Ayres 1998; 2004; Gabriel and Macdonald 1994; Macdonald 2002; Marchand and Runyan 2000; Marchand 2003). Some began to speak of "globalization from below," (e.g., Brecher, et.al. 2000) as they observed a growing convergence among disparate grassroots social forces from around the world in favour of what Richard Falk (1998) calls "normative democracy." Others, particularly those working from a neo-Gramscian perspective, also noted convergence but one based on active resistance to

US-led neoliberal globalization, the so-called Washington consensus (Gills 2000; Mittelman 2000; Gill and Mittelman 1997; Amoore 2005a; Eschle and Maignashca 2005b; Watson 2002). These analyses gained traction with the eruption of the world-wide “anti-globalization” movement, made manifest in the global North through a series of mass demonstrations at elite summits, beginning in Seattle in 1999 and the shut-down of the World Trade Organization negotiations.

Although international indigenous networks had been in formation since the 1970s and active at the UN since the 1980s, they have not figured prominently in literature on globalization or global civil society beyond being noted in lists of non-state actors in global civil society and the anti-globalization movement. They appear as place-based case studies of grassroots survival struggles against transnational corporations, as in the Ogonis against Shell Oil and the Nigerian state (Obi, 2000), against institutions of global governance, as in the Narmada Valley peoples’ movement against a World Bank dam (Kothari, 2002; Khagram, 2002), or with reference to emerging forms of environmental governance. The Zapatista rebellion in Chiapas in 1994 provoked intense interest across the social sciences and the phenomenon of *zapatismo* and the formation of transnational solidarity networks especially drew attention (Olesen, 2005; 2004).

By the 1990s, indigenous peoples as actors in world politics, civic or institutional, began to appear more consistently in wider literatures in international studies related to human rights and international law, particularly around the UN (Anaya, 1996; Barsh, 1994; Wiessner, 1999; Niezen, 2003). Key works on the development of a transnational indigenous movement include Wilmer, 1993; Brysk, 1994; Martin, 2003; Maignashca, 1996; Varese, 1996; Treacle, 1998; Díaz-Polanco, 1992. IR scholars have connected these literatures to IR problematics of international norms and regimes, particularly in studies of the transnational politics of Latin American indigenous movements (Martin, 2003; Brysk, 2000). But until very recently, indigenous movements have been largely missing from accounts of the development of and challenges to the current world order with the notable exception of works by indigenous scholars themselves (e.g., Stewart-Harawira, 2005).

This project is continuous with newly emerging work being done in international and critical globalization studies on indigenous peoples as political actors. Makere Stewart-Harawira (Stewart-Harawira, 2005), in her 2005 book, argued for the need for a new political ontology of world order and the salience of traditional indigenous ontologies in that undertaking (2-3; 16-19). She further observed that the greatest crisis and challenge facing the ‘movement of movements’ is an ontological one (232). In my view, this challenge is made all the more intractable by the fact it is largely unrecognized as such, except by indigenous peoples. In a similar vein, Marshall Beier argues that the emancipatory traditions of the West are also inscribed by the histories and legacies of colonialism. The universalizing tendencies of Western cosmology underpinned by assumptions of the authority of Western knowing positions allows these discourses to be projected as globally emancipatory. This, Beier argues, gives rise to violent erasures of its own, what he calls “emancipatory violences.” Even counter-hegemonic projects are caught in a particular cosmology--the hegemonic one which continues to exert dominance over non-Western populations and their life spaces, and which is simply taken as reality rather than one world-view among many co-existing on the planet (Beier, M., 2005:181ff.) (Beier, M., 2009).

Since 9/11 and the declaration of a global war on terror, the political terrain of ‘anti-globalization’ (a.k.a. ‘alter-globalization’ or ‘global justice’) politics has changed dramatically. In social movement scholarship, there has been a growing recognition of the significance of local, situated, or “place-based” resistances. Methodologically this has been accompanied by a

call for scholars of global/transnational resistance to combine critical theorizing with empirical study of the concrete practices of specific, situated movements (Eschle and Maiguashca 2005b). Furthermore, there is a need to recognize and study the connections among them (Amoore 2005b), specifically the possibility of transnational and transcultural connections based on reciprocity and redress of inequality (Eschle 2001). These recognitions create a more hospitable context in IR for the study of indigenous movements, which remain firmly anchored to particular geographies even as they transnationalize. This project is a response to these injunctions and to a serious gap in the literature on indigenous movements as transnational actors in world civic politics and particularly as constitutive elements in the anti-globalization movement.

On the WSF

Early commentators, drawing mostly on a single WSF event, have included Hardt 2002; Teivainen 2002; Mertes 2002; Seone and Taddei 2002; Smith, J., 2004 (Patomäki and Teivainen, 2004). Beyond IR, the first wave of analytical discourses consisted of short essays by leading left intellectuals and focused on questions of strategy and power in the context of the surging anti-globalization movement. Each year produces another round, which circulate widely and are gathered together on the WSF web site (www.forumsocialmundial.org.br). Important commentators and critics include: Houtart and Polet 2001; Savio 2005; 2006; Adamovsky 2003; Callinicos 2003; Wallerstein (Grzybowski, 2006). The first compilation of documents to appear focused on the alternatives to neoliberal globalization discussed at the 2002 WSF (Fisher and Ponniah 2003). The most important and internationalized collection is Sen, et al. 2004. Other collections followed the 2004 WSF in Mumbai, reflected the South Asian context and process, and focused on questions related to the WSF's methodology of 'open space' (Sen, et al. 2003; Keraghel, et al. 2004; Sen, et al. 2005). Sole author books by key Brazilian organizers have appeared (Leite 2005; Whitaker 2006). Feminists, focused largely on the role of women and feminism, have been most attentive to the internal power dynamics of the WSF and the contradictions of the 'open space' (Alvarez, et al. 2004; Vargas 2003, 2004; León 2002, 2005; Chejter and Laudano 2003; Gandhi and Shah 2006; Eschle 2005; Eschle, et al. 2005a). Scholar-activist collections have appeared in the on-line journal *Ephemera* 5:2 (Bohm, et al. 2005), in *Development* 48:2 (2005), and *Journal of International Women's Studies* 8:3 (2007). The most wide-reaching intellectual work on the WSF is being done by Portuguese legal scholar Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2003; 2004; 2005a,b,c 2006;). Overall, although with some important exceptions (e.g., Eschle; Vargas; Santos; Waterman), this body of literature is more activist than scholarly. It is diverse and dispersed, proceeding in different terms in various activist circles and in different regions of the world and without much reference to other work, scholarly or otherwise.

A wave of more scholarly work is now beginning to appear on the global justice movement, some of it paying significant attention to the WSF in terms of a variety of problematics and from a range of theoretical perspectives and disciplinary locations -- from complexity theory, network society, global civil society, to democratic theory. If these mention indigenous peoples at all, it is rarely, in passing or with reference only to the Zapatistas (Chesters and Welsh, 2006; Juris, 2008a; Juris, 2008b; Glasius and Timms, 2006; Glasius, Kaldor and Anheir, 2006; Löfgren and Thörn, 2007; Reitan, 2007; Munck, 2007; Doerr, 2008; Maeckelbergh, 2009; Smith, Karides, Becker, et al., 2008;). Some empirical studies of the WSF over a multi-year period are underway although none focused on indigenous engagement. Eschle and Maiguascha (2005a; 2010) have published a major study mapping feminisms at the WSF.

Reese et.al. are engaged in multi-year survey research on political attitudes among participants (Reese, Herkenrath, Chase-Dunn, et al., 2006). Other substantive work includes Peter Waterman's on transnational labour movements.

Scholarly work on indigenous participation in the Social Forum process, indeed in the anti-globalization movement more broadly, by either indigenous or non-indigenous writers, is practically non-existent. The exception to this is the extensive literature on the Zapatistas, although notably not with reference to the Social Forum. There is some attention to indigenous issues in León 2006 and Fisher and Ponniah 2003, but not to the movement *per se*. The collection edited by Mander and Tauli-Corpuz, 2006 provides a testimony to the myriad impacts of globalization on indigenous peoples and their resistances to them. The Tebtebba Foundation has published a compilation of declarations by indigenous groups on issues related to globalization (www.tebtebba.org). Few activist collections on the anti-globalization movement include pieces by indigenous activists beyond the requisite salute to the Zapatistas (Bobiwash, 2003; Bennett, 2001; Pelletier, 2001; Indigenous People's Seattle Declaration, 2000). There is some activist and scholarly commentary on racism in the movement but none which addresses indigenous exclusion specifically (Wong, 2001; Martinez, 2000; Starr, 2004). There is one scholarly article on racialization in the WSF (Alvarez, Gutierrez, Kim, et al., 2008). One of the tasks and contributions of this research project will be to inquire into the (in)visibility of indigenous activism in literature on the anti-globalization movement.

Analytic resources on modernity /coloniality

Scholars associated with the Latin American Research Group argue that coloniality is the underside of modernity and is thereby constitutive of the modern world system, from its inception in 16th century to the present.¹ 'Colonial difference' is that which has been rendered different through the coloniality of power, invalidated, shunned and suppressed, and thus disappeared from world history through the global hegemony of discourses centred on Western civilization, that is, through Eurocentrism. Furthermore, it is through their peculiar claims to universality, their systematic rejection of their own historical-geographical particularity, and their discrediting other forms and traditions of knowledge as unscientific, that Eurocentric forms of knowledge have silenced the colonial other. This "epistemic ethnocentrism," including of the political left, makes inclusive political philosophies grounded in Western traditions virtually impossible, they argue (Mignolo, W. D., 2002:66). These scholars converge in their agreement that solutions to the problems created through the modern/colonial world system will not be found in the traditions of Western knowledge nor, indeed, within modernity².

The alternative knowledges and practices that carry some possibility of redressing conditions of coloniality, i.e., the exclusion and suffering of the world's majorities under capitalism, are those which have been suppressed by modernity (Escobar, 2004:210) and which expose Western cosmologies as limited, particular, and arising from a geographically- and

¹ See Mignolo, W. D., 2000; Dussel, 2000; Dussel, 1998; Dussel, 2002; Quijano, 2000; Mignolo, W. D., 2002; Mignolo, W. D., 2003; Escobar, 2004 2008; 2007; Grosfoguel and Cervantes-Rodríguez, 2002; Grosfoguel, 2005; 2007; Maldonado-Torres, 2007; Schiwy, 2007; Walsh, C., 2007; 2002; Mignolo, W., 2007; Lugones, 2008; Quijano, 2007. The work of Portuguese social theorist and legal scholar Boaventura de Sousa Santos is convergent and often referenced by these thinkers. See Santos, 1999; 1995; 2003; 2004a; 2004b.

²For elaboration on their understanding of modernity, see Quijano, 2000:543-7.

historically-specific cultural rationality that has projected itself as universal. Santos states bluntly that alternatives must be searched for in the South and calls for an “epistemology of the South.” (Santos, 1995:506ff; 1999:38) While for Santos, the South is more a positionality of suffering and exclusion than a geographical location, Walter Mignolo asserts a “ratio between places (geohistorically constituted) and thinking, the geopolitics of knowledge proper.” (Mignolo, W. D., 2002:66; Grosfoguel, 2005:283–284)

In this framework, ‘the colonial difference’ is a privileged basis for knowing, an alternative standpoint. This is not a move to essentialize non-Western cultures but to recognize, in Escobar’s words, the

articulation of global forms of power with place-based worlds. In other words, there are practices of difference that remain in the exteriority (again, not outside) of the modern/colonial world system, incompletely conquered and transformed, if you wish, and also produced partly through long-standing place-based logics that are irreducible to capital and imperial globality.(221)

In the search for alternative futures, for ‘worlds and knowledges otherwise,’ Escobar advocates attention to the concrete practices of contemporary social movements from the perspective of colonial difference (210), to rethink theory through the political praxis of subaltern groups, (217) particularly the politics of difference enacted by those that more directly and simultaneously engage with imperial globality and global coloniality. (220)

Mignolo and Enrique Dussel (2000) especially are engaged in a polemic against postmodern critiques of modernity emanating from within Western civilization but which also express the ethnocentricity of Western philosophy. They are not advocating a rejection of modernity, rather a critical dialogue in which modernity’s underside, coloniality, in all its diversity, becomes an indispensable pole with which to read, critique and ultimately to fulfill the promise of modernity. Dussel has proposed “transmodernity” (rather than postmodernity) as a way of naming this possibility of a non-Eurocentric dialogue with alterity which “engages the colonialism of Western epistemology (from the left and from the right) from the perspectives of epistemic forces that have been turned into subaltern (traditional, folkloric, religious, emotional, etc.) forms of knowledge.” (Mignolo 2000, 11, cited by Escobar, 2004:219). Further, according to Mignolo, coloniality is “the platform of pluri-versality, of diverse projects coming from the experience of local histories touched by western expansion; thus coloniality is not a new abstract universal, but the place where diversality as a universal project can be thought out.” (personal communication cited by Escobar, 218).

Understood from within this analytic framework, anti-globalization movements are encountering each other on a historically unequal playing field constituted by the coloniality of power. Recognizing the character of contemporary world order as one of “global coloniality” (Escobar, 2004) puts decolonization on the agenda of movements world-wide, not just in their frontal contestations with hegemonic powers, but in the relations between movement themselves, especially across North/South, non-indigenous/indigenous, and modern emancipatory/subaltern ‘other’ divides. The movements of the first halves of the foregoing couplets have been hegemonic relative to their ‘others’, historically and currently, in and beyond the spaces of the anti-globalization movement. These arguments are provocative and potentially insightful in analyzing the difficulties between indigenous and non-indigenous entities in the anti-globalization movement and in proposing ways beyond the impasse.

The World Social Forum

Originally conceived as an alternative to the World Economic Forum held annually in Davos, Switzerland, the first World Social Forum (WSF) was convened at the height of the anti-globalization mobilizations in 2001 to gather groups and movements of civil society from around the world. The idea was to create an open forum for the free and horizontal exchange of ideas, experiences and strategies oriented to enacting and generating alternatives to neoliberalism. The gathering would be thoroughly international but anchored geographically and experientially in the global South. The first WSF, held in Porto Alegre, Brazil in January 2001, attracted 15,000 participants. Its astounding success led organizers to commit to the WSF as a permanent process. Each January since then, in varying modalities,³ the event has taken place, expanding in size, diversity, complexity, and importance.

After three years in Porto Alegre, Brazil, the WSF moved to Mumbai, India in 2004 and in 2007, to Nairobi, Kenya. Brazil remains the homeplace of the WSF, returning to Porto Alegre in 2005 and taking place in Belém in the Amazon in 2009, but there is now a widespread commitment to moving the world event geographically to other regions in the global South. This is a strategy for expanding the Forum and deepening its inter-continental and cross-cultural character. In a related move, at the second WSF in Porto Alegre in 2002, organizers called on participants to organize similar processes in their own places, defined by their own priorities, and at whatever scale made sense to them. Social forums have proliferated inspired by the world event and organized in accordance with the WSF's Charter of Principles, with regional scale processes emerging with particular vigour and importance.

Central to the functioning of the WSF to date has been the understanding that the World Social Forum is not a deliberative process. The WSF *qua* WSF does not make decisions, issue statements, nor embark on common actions. Rather, the WSF is best understood as an open, autonomous, and civil society space in which participants are invited to self-organize, to advance their campaigns, and to mount activities for one another, aimed building broad political convergence across difference. The WSF is not a unitary entity. No one can therefore 'represent' the WSF.

The civil society entities present at the World Social Forum vary considerably depending on the location of the event but are in every case amazingly diverse in their demographic make-up, organizational forms, cultural expressions, geographic roots and reach, strategies, tactics, and discourses.⁴ In any analytical discussion about the WSF, it is critical to maintain a distinction between the World Social Forum and its constituent social movements and networks. The latter act in and beyond the WSF but also help constitute the WSF as event and space. The WSF is

³The 2006 World Social Forum was organized as a poly-centric process, with the "world" event taking place over three sites, Bamako, Mali; Caracas, Venezuela; and Karachi, Pakistan, each organized with a high degree of autonomy and regional specificity. In 2008, the world event was a global day of action dispersed over hundreds of sites and finding expression on every continent.

⁴The WSF is open to any group anywhere in the world who professes opposition to neoliberalism, who is not a political party and who is not engaged in armed struggle. See the WSF charter of principles at <http://www.forumsocialmundial.org.br>.

both more than and different from the sum of these movements; and the movements are more than and different from the sum of their practices vis-a-vis the WSF. The WSF and its constituent movements all have their own particular and evolving praxes. Similarly, it is important to distinguish between the WSF as a massive, mutating and complex phenomenon enacted in plateau events, and its governing bodies, the WSF International Council and the Organizing Committees of any particular event. The world event, along with the organizing processes in which it is embedded and through which it is produced, is significantly re-created when it is taken up by groups in different parts of the world.

A short history of indigenous presence at the WSF

Historically, indigenous peoples and their perspectives have been exceedingly marginal at the World Social Forums in Brazil. Demographically, they are about 550,000 indigenous persons in Brazil, about .15% of the national population, reduced from six million at the time of contact. In the present, their populations are concentrated in the states of Amazonas and Mato Grosso--far from Rio Grande do Sol, in which is situated the city of Porto Alegre in the far south of the country. In the early years of the WSF in Porto Alegre, indigenous people were most visible selling crafts or performing in cultural spectacles, a role that was decried at the time by indigenous delegates and more recently by non-indigenous organizers as merely 'folkloric'. In 2001, an indigenous encampment along with the first of what would be a series of youth camps were erected in Harmonia Park, in the city of Porto Alegre but off-site from the WSF which was held at PUC (check). According to Rodney Bobiwash, Anishnabek activist from the Mississauga First Nation in Ontario, Canada, the only time he saw indigenous persons at the first WSF was on the last day of the Forum, when they were admitted to the space to set up craft fair:

“There were a number of indigenous people participating in the Indigenous Encampment near the edge of town -- located beside the Youth Camp. However there was no formal involvement in the program of the WSF and no presence as delegates. The only time people from the Camp showed up at the Forum was on the final day when they camped out on the grounds of the university selling their crafts off blankets on the ground. It appears that the rubric of Civil Society around which the WSF was organized has still much to learn about Indigenous participation -- the creation of these Potemkin Villages as sources of entertainment does not replace real participation and is unacceptable.”
(Bobiwash, 2001b)

“They were sitting on blankets, selling trinkets...coloured beads and plastic bows and arrows. They should have been inside the conference. They should have been delegates.” (Bobiwash, 2001a)

It is not clear whose initiative this encampment was. According to leading WSF organizer, Gustavo Codas, who from 2001 to 2008, represented the CUT on the IC of the WSF and was closely involved in all aspects of the organizing of the Fora in Brazil, there was no specific policy/politics that sought to address or to include indigenous participants on the part of the eight entities who founded the WSF in 2001. The only organizing effort to support indigenous participation in 2001 or 2002 was on the part of the government entity of the state of Rio Grande do Sol whose mandate was to work with the indigenous peoples of that state (Codas, 2009).

The one event featuring indigenous speakers in 2001 was cast in the category of 'testimonial.' It and was scheduled in direct conflict with a marquee event featuring Eduardo Galeano and so was poorly attended and went largely unnoticed. It featured people from the Mexican National Council of Indians and CONAIE from Ecuador. Notably, there were no indigenous participants from the host country of Brazil.

Starting in 2002, and perhaps learning from these critiques, WSF organizers began to feature at least one major conference focused on indigenous rights with indigenous people doing the talking. As a participant in the 2002 event, my impression was that the 160 indigenous delegates (of 60,000 WSF participants) had far greater visibility than their tiny numbers suggested. They were prominent in opening and closing ceremonies and in large conferences, they called for recognition as nations within their nation states. Matthew Coon Come, the Grand Chief of the Assembly of First Nations, was featured on the programme. The visibility of the small number of Amazonian indigenous participants, however, especially in the mass marches, can also be attributed to their traditional adornment--and the hordes of photographers they attracted among media and WSF participants wherever they went. We will return to this point.

From early on, indigenous presenters came from outside Brazil, most from elsewhere in the Americas and their political discourses were accordingly diverse, including concepts of unity in diversity; the plurinational state; co-existence without assimilation, indigenous self-determination; diversity; self-representation; demands for autonomy, collective rights to land, governance; administrative decentralization/pluralism; no to mega projects; and to social rights in culturally appropriate ways (Maldos, 2003). However, in terms of indigenous involvement in any aspect of the organizing processes of the Forum, or in actively organizing to amplify the indigenous presence in the WSF, those involved were virtually all from Brazil and thus their discourses focused on struggles in those terms: for recognition of territorial rights, for land demarcation, for protection from invading settlers (Makuxi, Temb , Wapixana, et al., 2003:180).

A critical focus on resource extraction has been growing in the WSF in general and here, indigenous presenters have been featured. Marc Becker, a US-based historian of Ecuadoran indigenous movements is one of the few who report on the WSF to regularly note the presence and activities of indigenous peoples. About the 2003 event, he reported :

a small but significant segment of the forum represented the concerns of Indigenous peoples. For example, in a panel on the impact of the mining industry on Indigenous peoples, Marcelo from the Asamblea de Pueblo Guaran  discussed Shell and Enron's exploitation of petroleum resources on Guaran  lands in Bolivia. Henry Tito Vargas of Vigilancia Social de la Industria Extractiva (VSIE) in Bolivia argued that it was important to develop alliances between people in North America and Europe where multinational corporations are located and the developing world where the impact of their exploitative policies are often felt the most directly and harshly. V ctor L pez, discussing the situation of the Shuar in the Ecuadorian Amazon, noted how national governments often attempt to exploit resources on Indigenous lands to pay the country's external debt. Local people realize little gain in terms of internal development or social programs.

The Brazilian Indigenous Institute War  organized a panel on human rights, pointing out that the needs of Indigenous peoples are often different than those of other sectors of society. Nilo Cayuqueo, a Mapuche activist from southern Argentina, recounted the history of Indigenous resistance in South America, with communities seeking to break free of the paternalistic control and domination of Catholic priests and

governmental officials. Slowly, Indians have received more control and autonomy over their own lives, a process that activists seek to extend further.

(...) ... Indigenous peoples [were also] calling for expanded participation of Indigenous peoples in the forum.... Some Indigenous organizations are proposing holding a parallel forum to the World Social Forum when it returns to Porto Alegre in 2005 (Becker, 2003).

It was the 2004 WSF in Mumbai, India that issued a strong challenge to the relative marginality of indigenous peoples in the Forum in Brazil. The Indian organizers of the WSF in Mumbai in 2004 were far more intentional and successful in politically incorporating mass movements of tribal peoples. Discourses of indigenous land rights and critiques of development emerged powerfully in the Mumbai event.

Tom Goldtooth of the US-based Indigenous Environmental Network and member of Dine' Mdewakanton Dakota people from Minnesota, reported that his networks had opted out of the Social Forum in the early years because its outcomes were so intangible. It was not clear how useful participating would be to indigenous organizations. US-based indigenous activists including Goldtooth were invited to the WSF in Mumbai as part of the US-based Grassroots Global Justice network.⁵ There, he recounted, indigenous people from North America encountered others from Asia and Africa, as well as adivasi groups from India. For all of them, the Mumbai event was their first encounter with the WSF and their evaluations about its usefulness/relevance were very cautious. (use of resources; who were indigenous who were involved; our commitment to base-building)

“we said, let’s wait and see. There is a lot of people here, one thing we agree on is that if we do not take part in this social forum, then who is lifting up the voices and struggles of indigenous peoples from the regions of the world? And I think that was basically one of the strong reasons that we decided to continue to participate in the Social Forum, to provide a voice.” (Goldtooth, 2008)

The Mumbai event also figures importantly in the recollections of key non-indigenous Brazilian organizers of the WSF and member of the International Council. Moema Miranda recalls:

“In the first WSFs from 2001 to 2003, the indigenous presence was very sporadic and dispersed with no collective representation as indigenous organizations; thus, the indigenous participation was very much composed of groups which were (geographically) close to Porto Alegre. I think that in some way, the Forum taking place in India made note of the relevance and importance of a more systematic presence of ‘original peoples’ and among them, indigenous peoples. Therefore, when the Forum returned to Brazil in 2005, we began to work, in the International Council and Organizing Committee, [to create/build] more organic and organized conditions for the participation

⁵GGJ would later go on to be a major organizing force for the 2007 US Social Forum in Atlanta, which had an especially explicit anti-colonial praxis and was marked by significant leadership and participation of indigenous peoples.

of the indigenous movement; at which time, we worked primarily with COICA⁶. And there, as the Forum was not [yet] organized territorially, we [the Forum and indigenous communities, primarily through representatives of COICA] agreed to organize a space of their own for the indigenous, which we called PUXIRUM, which included the designation of a solidarity fund to guarantee the presence, on behalf of several indigenous groups.

... we can say that there was a confluence of interests, among them the International Council, the Brazilian Organizing Committee, the indigenous groups and especially in the Expansion Commission of the IC, there was consciousness of the indigenous absence, as [the Commission] worked on expansion in terms of geography, themes and social groups.” (Miranda, 2009)

At the II Continental Summit of the People and Indigenous Nationalities of Abya Yala⁷ in July 2004 in Quito, Ecuador, a broad range of indigenous organizations issued a joint call to indigenous peoples of the Americas to participate with them in PUXIRUM at the 2005 WSF, among them COICA, COIAB, APOINME and UNISUR of Brazil, CICA (Central America), World Alliance of the Indigenous and Tribal People of the Tropical Forests, CONAIE (Ecuador), ONIC (Colombia), ONPIA (Argentina) and CONADI (Chile). So from a variety of indigenous organizations, as well as from within the leadership of the Forum in Brazil, there appeared a desire for a more ‘organic’, organized, and broadly representative presence of indigenous peoples in the Forum-- in terms of participation, but also in establishing a specifically indigenous space, with its own processes, modalities, methodologies, and themes as determined by the indigenous organizations themselves. Puxirum was first serious attempt at this at the world level of the WSF.⁸

PUXIRUM, “a joining of efforts for the common good” in Tipi-Guarani, the main indigenous language of Brazil, was intended to focus on indigenous knowledges, arts and spirituality. 400 people participated, representing some 100 different peoples. The following is an excerpt from a promotional email being circulated in advance of the event:

According to Rona Santos, a member of the COICA - Coordinating Body for the Indigenous Organizations of the Amazon Basin, entity that is organizing the Puxirum, this is the first time that indigenous peoples come to the WSF in an organized way. "In the last Forums their participation was isolated, as guests or lecturers in some events. This is the first time that indigenous people take part with a specific activity", says Rona.

⁶COICA was founded in 1984 as a coordination of indigenous organizations in the nine countries of the Amazon regions. COICA represents more than 390 peoples and 2.8 million individuals. www.coica.org.ec

⁷ In reconstructing this history of indigenous peoples engagement with the WSF process, it is important to recognize the larger process of the consolidation of a continental indigenous movement. One of its key modalities has been the gathering every eighteen months in summits called Cumbres. For an account of this history, see (Becker, 2008).

⁸ As noted above, the Mumbai event was significant in raising these questions. The hemispheric Americas Social Forum in Quito in July 2004 was also historic in the protagonism of indigenous peoples in the process of the Forum. This would be repeated in Guatemala in October 2008. The first USSF in June 2007 is also a very strong and interesting example of indigenous leadership in the process. It remains however, that these counter-examples have had little or no effect on the conception and practice of the SF in Brazil, at least at the world-level events.

The Puxirum will be an opportunity to show all the other peoples of the world the principles that base the life of indigenous communities, which are the respect to diversity, the ethics of reciprocity and the shared responsibility. "Taking as a base the main theme of the WSF - Another world is possible -, our slogan is: "indigenous peoples, we are another world". We consider ourselves to be part of this process. In the case of Latin America, we were already here before the constitution of the national states and we would like that to be recognized", says Rona. One of the aspects of the indigenous' everyday life highlighted by the Coica representative is the ethics of reciprocity. According to this principle, the goods or food of a community are for collective use, solidarity shared according to the need.

Arts and knowledges

Inside Puxirum, the handicraft of various peoples will have their own space, with the setting of a fair to show pieces elaborated through the most varied techniques and materials. A show of indigenous outfits is also programmed, demonstrating the diversity of garments and body paintings. Performances with their dance and music are also programmed. Spirituality, a strong cultural trait of these peoples, besides being present along the programming, will be the main theme in one of the Puxirum days, when there will be an approach of ancestral knowledges and spiritual rituals. The artistic programming will combine with the debate of themes as the problem of the indigenous territory, natural resources and human sustainability, constitutional rights and their own legal system, diversity and democracy." (personal communication from R. Espinoza): 4/1/2005. See also (Osava, 2005).

According to Moema Miranda, the evaluation of indigenous organizers of PUXIRUM was that it was an excessively ghettoized space. It was geographically located on one extreme end of the WSF territory, which was comprised of 11 thematic spaces strung along the banks of the Rio Guaiba. Many WSF participants never made it to PUXIRUM, and by the latter half of the Forum, many of the indigenous participants had themselves opted out to participate in other Forum activities. This is borne out by my experience there. I spent the fourth(?) day of the WSF at PUXIRUM. It was very thinly populated, in contrast to the throngs elsewhere on the WSF site, although with a notable presence of some white 'new age' youth. There was no translation provided, including from local indigenous languages into Portuguese-- so the poor infrastructure mitigated against PUXIRUM's functioning as an initiative to make audible indigenous peoples' perspectives to others.⁹ According to Miranda, PUXIRUM was a space designed in every aspect by the participating indigenous organizations themselves; however, some significant indigenous leaders deemed it excessively folkloric, as underdeveloped politically, and many criticized its spatial location. Nevertheless, PUXIRUM as an initiative did enable a new level of collaboration and coordination among different indigenous organizations. A public document of CAO I¹⁰, for example, published in 2006, recalled that the first coordinated international participation between Andean and Amazonian indigenous organizations took place through PUXIRUM at the 2005 WSF, which "demonstrate[d] a complementary intention and practice

⁹Note that this was more general problem; but it speaks to how central/not it was.

¹⁰Coordinadora Andina de las Organizaciones Indigenas -- discussed more fully below.

between Andeans and Amazonians [and] which also made visible indigenous peoples for the first time in the WSF.” (CAOI, 2006)

In Miranda’s judgement, PUXIRUM, despite its shortcomings, enabled and marked the entry of indigenous peoples into the WSF (Miranda, 2009). Gustavo Codas, however, offers a more ambiguous assessment. Even PUXIRUM which did mark increased participation by indigenous peoples, was not the result of

“an indigenous protagonism in the process of constructing the Forum. The Forum opens a space, calls the indigenous to come and represent themselves, to present their problems, questions, etc. but this is different than if indigenous organizations went, as an organization more from the organizing committee with its opinion as an organizer of the Forum. Thus, they are invited to participate, more than being protagonists of WSF.” (Codas, 2009)

According to Miranda, toward the 2009 event in Belem and partly as a result of the experience with PUXIRUM, there was already present understanding and commitment on the part of the IC and the Belem organizing committee to assure a significant presence of indigenous peoples, especially those of the Amazon and that the solidarity fund would give priority to supporting indigenous participation, and that this would be a permanent priority. However, Codas contends that the process towards Belem continued to be characterized by very minimal participation by indigenous peoples in the organizing--certainly up to September 2008.

A meeting of the IC in Copenhagen in Sept 2008, did produce a strong statement¹¹ affirming the importance of indigenous participation in the 2009 WSF and constituted a Working Group of the IC on indigenous participation as part of its Commission on Expansion. However, this group was comprised completely of non-indigenous persons and came very late in the day -- only five months prior to the Belem event.¹² It also by-passed a pre-existing initiative based in Belém and sponsored by the PT government of Pará (Dos Santos, 2008) When the composition of the IC’s working group was challenged by a member of this group, the two groups collaborated (but, it seems, did not merge). The local organizing effort was lent momentum, and a stronger connection with the IC, by the arrival in Belém in November of Roberto Espinoza, the technical staff of CAOI and a non-indigenous Peruvian, who subsequently coordinated the overall effort (Miranda, 2009). Organizers delegated by the Amazonian organizations, COIAB and COICA, joined the effort in January.

Donna Iza Dos Santos, a representative of the indigenous peoples’ working group of the PT Government of the state of Pará, which was a mixed group of indigenous and non-indigenous but working under the direction of indigenous peoples, spoke at the Americas Social Forum in Guatemala in October 2008, three months prior to the WSF in Belém. On its behalf, she issued an invitation to all indigenous people of the continent to come to Belem, reported on

¹¹See (Courteille and Mestrum, 2008) for an English rendition of the text.

¹² Despite this statement, the discourses that the WSF organizers produced about the Belem event on its web site in the months immediately preceding and during the event notably did NOT speak of indigenous peoples as actors in the WSF or the global justice movement -- rather the peoples of the Amazon were presented as part of the biodiversity that made the Amazon region globally important. There is much more to say about this as well as the iconography of the WSF in the city of Belem and on the site -- which were posters, each featuring a head shot of an Amazonian indigenous person in traditional dress.

the logistical efforts involved in hosting them and (in a show of common cause?) read the IC statement on indigenous participation in the WSF (Dos Santos, 2008).

In a subsequent interview, Dos Santos recalled that one of the goals of PUXIRUM had been to form a network of indigenous organizations to sort out processes for indigenous participation and self-representation in the WSF, particularly in its key governance body, the International Council. It was clear that, for her, this remained a critical and unresolved question and an organizing objective towards the 2009 WSF:¹³ In particular, she expressed concern about the leadership role assumed by CAOI, evident in the Guatemala event and more generally in the organizing process that was gathering momentum toward Belem. She saw CAOI as the sole (certainly preeminent) indigenous organizing force toward Belém--in contrast to the organizing toward PUXIRUM in 2005, in which COICA, CONAIE and ONIC (Columbia) were all implicated.

CAOI, the Co-ordination of Andean Indigenous Organization, is network of national indigenous organizations of six countries that emerged formally in July 2006 after a decade-long process of consolidation. Its founders recognized their need as Andean indigenous peoples to have a coordinated presence on the international stage. Their founding makes explicit reference to being complementary to, and perhaps inspired by, the Amazonian international co-ordination, COICA, founded in 1984, which has a considerably longer history and much greater visibility internationally.

For a year prior to the WSF in Belem, representatives of CAOI argued in the International and Hemispheric Councils of the WSF for the need to create a thematic area exclusively for indigneous peoples, which under their coordination, they saw realized in Belem and through which they advanced a process of articulation with organizations of Amazonian indigenous peoples. It is important to note here that the IC has perhaps two other indigenous organizations listed as members, one of whom is CONAIE, a member of CAOI, and the other a Mexican national network who has never participated in the IC. In this vacuum, CAOI's asserting itself as a voice for indigenous peoples would have found traction among those searching for such a representative. CAOI's overall objective toward Belem, according to the Co-ordinator General of CAOI, Miguel Palacin, was: "from among the excluded, to persuade them not to be excluded; and also, in a time of crisis, in the search for an alternative, we believe that the indigenous peoples have an alternative distinct from Western thought." (Palacin, 2009) According to Palacin, CAOI did not set out to co-ordinate the indigenous programming at the Forum but they ended up doing it and were pleased with the results.

In the Americas Social Forum in Guatemala in October 2008, CAOI took the initiative and actively collaborated with the Guatemala-based La Convergencia Maya Waqib-Kej. This is, in part, the backdrop of dos Santos' concerns about the self-representation of indigenous peoples in the WSF: how certain groups (in this case, CAOI) are invited into the IC and are seen as representing 'indigenous peoples' in a global way without there being a proper process of

¹³ It is my impression that her concern reflected those of the Brazilian Amazonian groups more generally, about CAOI: its relatively recent emergence, its strong influence over the shape of indigenous participation in Belem, and the weight of its voice in the IC as 'representing' indigenous peoples with a mandate (Dos Santos, 2008). More generally, this is a concern about processes of self-representation of indigenous peoples in non-indigenous political spaces.

mandating them from indigenous communities. Their being invited into the IC without such a mandating process is problematic. In her view, they have to put the question of their representation of indigenous peoples as a collectivity to a process with indigenous peoples to clarify this (Dos Santos, 2008).

From a perspective on the International Council, Moema Miranda, noted that it was important that the Forum's organizing efforts with indigenous peoples be distinct from the initiative of the government in Pará--for political reasons, but also because there were monies associated with the solidarity fund that had to be dispersed. But for dos Santos, this also raises questions about who gets to attend the Forum as indigenous people and who decides. So, in Belem, according to dos Santos: "We are organizing a a space where we're going to be able to discuss the indigenous representation in the Social Forum and other fora..." the UN, which demand collective representation (Dos Santos, 2008).

Dos Santos also saw organizing a coordinated indigenous presence in the WSF as an opportunity for indigenous peoples of Latin America to consolidate politically, to work out issues of representation, and to work towards shared understandings and priorities from a diverse set of discourses:

"We have to speak with women, with the peasant organizations, with all those marginalized, but how are we to have influence with these others if we are not organized among ourselves... some [of us] want to talk about buen vivir, others climate change, others territorial rights." (Dos Santos, 2008)

Indigenizing the World Social Forum?

The 2009 World Social Forum took place January 27 to February 1 in the equatorial city of Belém do Pará. It was the fifth time the world event took place in Brazil, but the first time outside the southern city of Porto Alegre. As with the earlier events, Belém attracted hordes of participants— 130,000 of them from 142 countries but well over ninety percent of whom were Brazilian, many of them from Pará and neighbouring states in the Brazilian North. The local newspaper reported participation by 1900 indigenous persons from 120 ethnic groups and 1400 Afro-descendants. Although these numbers represent breakthroughs by the WSF's historical standards in Brazil, the Forum remained an overwhelmingly light-skinned, young, urban, Brazilian and Portuguese-speaking space—as had been the case in Porto Alegre also (Alvarez, Gutierrez, Kim, et al., 2008). Paradoxically, it was this Forum's novel and clear-eyed focus on the host locality that also was the occasion for its most significant political advances. Climate change, resource extraction and the plight of indigenous peoples were particularly prominent.

In the lead-up, this WSF was billed as a pan-Amazonian event, recognizing the global environmental significance of the river and the rain forest and the transnational political character of a bio-region that traverses the frontiers of Brazil, Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia, Colombia, Venezuela, Guyana, French Guiana, and Suriname. This World Social Forum event built on a pan-Amazonian process that had seen four social forums organized in the region between 2002 and 2005. The first day of programming was dedicated to the Amazon and its peoples and the threats represented by climate change, mega-projects and extractive industries. This explicit and

intentional political attention to a particular place on the planet was a novel development for the World Social Forum, especially in its Brazilian enactments which have regularly been more cosmopolitan in their aspirations and internationalist in the discourses and practices of the organizers.

Perhaps because of these orientations, the World Social Forum in Brazil has been historically weak on environmental questions. The Belém event offered some important correctives to this in its focused attention to ‘place’ and the global significance of place-based struggles. Expressions of this ranged from the spectacular to the mundane, the precious to the problematic: Amazon Watch, a Northern-based international environmental NGO, orchestrated an aerial photo of a thousand Amazonian indigenous people spelling out ‘Save the Amazon’ with their bodies; a “fuck for the forest” campaign in the Youth Camp; drum-beating, flag-waving vegetarians invading the food courts; the Brazilian Minister of Justice arriving with a police escort and hovering helicopters to hear Amazonian indigenous leaders’ protests about land invasions by settlers and multi-nationals despite constitutional protections. Whatever one’s reactions to any one of these occurrences, and they were heated and varied among participants, that hundreds of less spectacular events wove a novel politics of environmental justice through the WSF programme in Belém was indisputable.

The choice of Belém as a site helped propel the appearance of these discourses among entities that had not before attended much to questions of climate change, resource extraction or indigenous peoples. It also provoked a new prominence within the Social Forum of international environmental NGOs like Amigos de la Tierra and Amazon Watch, indigenous peoples in general and indigenous groups of the Brazilian Amazon in particular, and indigenous-environmental coalitions like Alianza Amazonica. It is interesting to note in the lead-up to the event, the official rationales for the choice of Belém by Forum organizers made no mention of indigenous peoples beyond vague references to the bio- and cultural diversity of the region. By the time of the Forum however, local indigenous groups had assumed a highly visible, although not unambiguous role in the constitution of the Forum. This was assisted both by the choice of Belém as a site and developments within the indigenous movements themselves.

Fueled by events over the last decade in Ecuador and Bolivia in which indigenous peoples have been central protagonists, there is a continental indigenous movement in formation, with strong leadership emanating from the Andean region. The Co-ordinación Andina, in partnership with Amazonian and Guatemalan entities, assumed major responsibility for orchestrating the historically-unprecedented indigenous presence in Belém. The indigenous peoples’ tent was the site of vibrant and diverse discussions, prominent among them a series of events on “civilizational crises.” What was extraordinary in the context of the Forum, and perhaps more generally, was the assertiveness with which indigenous leaders articulated alternatives central to imagining other possible worlds: concepts of plurinationality and *buen vivir* (living well—not better), indigenous knowledge of climate change and sustainable interaction with natural environments, radical perspectives on post-development, and direct action in defense of their lands and their survival as peoples against developmentalist governments, land-hungry settlers, and rapacious corporations.

Differences and tensions were apparent between indigenous entities from different regions who are differently positioned in their own countries and internationally. This was especially evident between the Brazilian Amazonians and those from outside the region, from countries with sizable indigenous populations, with longer histories of collaboration with one

another, and resulting cross-fertilization of discourses and perspectives. The most advanced dialogues appear to be underway among indigenous women, who listened carefully and respectfully to those from contexts different from their own and support each others' voices, especially with respect to men in their communities. Indigenous women are preparing for the first continental encounter of indigenous women which will take place in Puno, Peru in late May in advance of the fourth Cumbre of indigenous peoples and nationalities of Abya Yala (the Americas). The Cumbre process has enabled this intellectual and political efflorescence of indigenous peoples and indigenous entities are using the Social Forum process in the Americas to advance the consolidation and expand the international reach of their movement.

For the Amazonian indigenous peoples of Brazil and their relationships both to non-indigenous movements and to the Social Forum process in Brazil, the Belém event seemed a watershed event in the sheer numerical strength and visibility of the former. They numbered well over 1000, mostly men, and highly visible in their distinctiveness with painted bodies, feathered headdresses, and hand-crafted weapons. In the indigenous peoples' tent, they often entered as groups, singing and dancing and were subsequently identified according to what Brazilian state they hailed from. In one extraordinary moment, a highly-respected older man was invited to come to the dias. He was recognized by the moderator as a leader of national stature. He was sent off from his place in the bleachers by his community who stood and chanted, and he was escorted—danced-- to the stage by two warriors linked into him.

Another powerful moment occurred in the opening march through downtown Belem. The march, like the Forum, was overwhelmingly peopled by young, light-skinned Brazilians of the host region. From where I was for most of the event, surveying the first two-thirds of the massive parade, there was no indigenous presence of any kind. Following a large, raucous and diverse indigenous peoples' assembly at UFRA that same morning, their absence was startling. Had they decided not to participate in the march? Was it conceivable that they were at the end of the march—which in Canada would have been an insult?

Suddenly, there appeared, singing and dancing, a group of perhaps thirty Amazonian indigenous youths, moving as a bloc up through the stream of demonstrators, stopping periodically to chant and bop before surging ahead. And in their wake came a line of indigenous leaders stretched the width of the march, armed locked and moving fast, opening a path through the crowd through sheer force of their collective presence and momentum. What was this about? Was this a political statement? Was this a normal mode of being in a mass demo that I had never before seen? Was it a way of moving to the front of a march where, in Brazil, as in many places, the front lines are colonized by political parties of the left with their flags, banners and chants? Its ambiguity intensified when, upon arriving at the march's destination, it became apparent that these same indigenous leaders were the central actors in the opening ceremonies.

The opening ceremonies were noteworthy in their remarkable departure from past practice. Unlike the highly professionalized and thoroughly internationalized extravaganzas of music, song, dance and political speeches in Porto Alegre, Mumbai or Nairobi, the opening in Belém was one hundred per cent indigenous—vastly different in tone, mode and personnel. Although the Andeans made an appearance, it was an event almost exclusively expressive of indigenous groups from the Brazilian Amazon. Indigenous delegations were identified and invited to move through the crowd to the stage, which they did often by linking arms and snaking fluidly as groups through the throngs of people. Group after group enacted greetings to the crowd through their communal songs, dances, poetry and occasionally in a speech. What to make of

this—in terms of indigenous positionality in the Belém event, in Brazilian movement politics, or in the World Social Forum process more generally, remains an open question.

The fourth day of the Forum was ‘alliances day,’ an innovation of the 2007 event in Nairobi and expressed in Belém through sectoral assemblies, all of which produced declarations. The indigenous peoples gathered at the WSF in Belem issued a call for a global day of action on October 12, the anniversary of Columbus’ arrival in the Americas, in defense of Mother Earth and against the commodification of life, and for a thematic social forum in 2010 on the crisis of civilization—notably including but not limited to the financial meltdown.

Is the global justice movement colonial?

Like any World Social Forum, the event in Belém eludes definitive analysis. It continues to provoke awe, critique, comparison and bafflement. No one account can do justice to the vast array and richness of the processes underway in any one iteration of the Social Forum, much less in terms of its mutations and accumulations across time and space. However, in terms of the central question animating this research project, ‘is the anti-globalization movement colonial?’ some critical observations are coming into view and which require more extended reflection:

1. In its instantiations in Brazil, WSF organizers did not, until 2005, consider the absence of indigenous people to be a problem requiring specific attention. When it did, its prevailing discourses are to ‘invite them into the open space’ as one among many diverse, self-organizing movements. This is related to a tendency to construct the indigenous movements as outside and coming into the global justice movement, as opposed to (1) having helped constitute it from its first appearances as a recognizable movement-of-movements in the mid-late 1990s and (2) having a history of resistance to colonialism that is 500 years old and is arguably the ‘wider’ movement to which the rest of us, certainly in the Americas, should be seeking entrance.
2. Where indigenous people were present, as occasional presenters and as artisans and performers, their incorporation appears highly tokenistic and or exoticizing. Even where indigenous people were present in larger numbers and with coordinated and forceful political discourses, individuals were constantly objectified by being photographed. Indigenous persons were central icons of the Belem event event as their participation in the planning processes was very late and their effect on the event as a whole, debatable.
3. The recent auto-critique of the WSF’s non-indigenous leadership of reducing indigenous peoples/participation to the ‘folkloric’ is double-edged in that the modes of indigenous gathering and discussion, ie. doing politics in the WSF, include rituals, expressions and discourses that are experienced as different and are easily exoticized. A rejection of the folkloric by the left can be a demand to act/speak/dress as we do.
4. ‘Indigenous peoples’, as a term, appears constantly in the lists of movements in the WSF and as an attribute of its ‘diversity.’ Their issues are among an endless list generated by the movements in “a politics of undifferentiated difference” (Bakan, 2008)¹⁴ What is at stake for groups of settler/civil society in these representations of the movement of movements and the WSF?

¹⁴I am borrowing this fecund term from Bakan but using it differently.

5. Many calls for participation and declaration by indigenous people, in the WSF and more generally, starts from an assertion of their presence on their territories since time immemorial and their shared reality of the Conquest, their murder, dispossession and enslavement, their 500 years of resistance and survival, and the continuation of these dynamics in the present. In neither documents nor the discourses nor the organizing practices of the WSF in Belem, where indigenous peoples had greater prominence than ever before, is there any recognition of Brazil or other nations of the Americas as colonial societies, founded on the theft of indigenous land.

6. There is a silence, or a refusal to recognize ‘race’ in the WSF and, I would argue, in the many spaces of the ‘anti-globalization’ movement world-wide which are dominated by ‘white’ people. The WSF’s IC is dominated by Europeans and Euro-Latin Americans. The WSF in Brazil is consistently and overwhelmingly a light-skinned affair.¹⁵ This refusal to recognize the whiteness of the space and of its political culture, coupled with discourses of pluralism and diversity in an ‘open space’ make it exceedingly difficult to talk about racism, racial exclusion, subalternity or coloniality within the global justice movement (or within ‘global civil society, and the relations between these two constructs.) In the Americas (and arguably elsewhere (Sen, 2007)), ‘civil societies’ are the settler societies whose dominance is established through the colonization of subaltern populations, their lands and their labour.

7. The colonial character of nation states and their historical and contemporary role in exterminating indigenous peoples, whether through ongoing violent dispossession of their lands and resources or through cultural assimilation, is almost completely unrecognized in the WSF and by the majority of non-indigenous movements present therein whose politics remain statist. Even the majority the ‘stateless peoples’ are seeking states. National attachments are still the primary ways people identify themselves. The opening and closing ceremonies of WSFs in Brazil have often featured national roll calls.¹⁶

8. Many of the entities present in the WSF, as organizations of ‘civil society’ have been implicated in colonial projects, past and present: including churches and NGOs, along with states and TNCs (Goldtooth, 2008; Apurina, 2009; Escobar, 2009). While the positionality of churches and NGOs in the WSF is highly variable in terms of critical awareness of coloniality, the ambiguous history of relations between these kinds of organizations and indigenous peoples is rarely spoken of. Similar points could be made about relations with left or feminist movements, many expressions of which remain unproblematically modernist in their underpinnings.

9. The prevalence of rights discourses in the WSF can provide many points of contact with indigenous peoples claims but what is the status of indigenous rights relative to other rights? There is no sense that they have to be foundational and first (Goldtooth, 2008).

¹⁵(Alvarez, Gutierrez, Kim, et al., 2008) report high rates of refusal among Brazilian and European participants at the WSF. In Brazil, they link it to ideologies of ‘racial democracy’.

¹⁶See (Bobiwash, 2001) and (Varghese, 2009): Ashok Chowdhury of National Forum of Forest Peoples and Forest Workers quoted: “In his opinion, the Forum needs to operate outside the framework of the nation-states if it is serious about “creating a new world” – a world which the “indigenous peoples alone” can envisage at the moment. As the dominating elite in the nation-states however, the civil societies – which are born out of the same dynamics – run the show in the Forum. The Forum needs to learn to think beyond the modern-day international boundaries if it is to be the space for movements from across the world to build alliances and exchange ideas, as mentioned in its Charter of Principles (CoP). Issues pertaining to regions and not necessarily countries gave rise to movements.”

10. There are tensions and reservations among indigenous movements themselves about the utility of the WSF in terms of concretely advancing their struggles. There are enormous costs associating with participating, not only in the events but as ‘protagonists’, which are not generally acknowledged by non-indigenous organizers, who are more privileged, well-resourced, and live in cities which are the loci of organizing (Palacin, 2009; Hernandez, 2009).

11. There are debates among indigenous organizers about the relationship of separate indigenous spaces to having meaningful exchange with others and having their concerns more integrated across the WSF. (Points 10 and 11 are resonant with feminist ambivalence about the WSF).

12. There is an enduring concern among indigenous organizers about their right to represent themselves, in the Forum and elsewhere. There are widely shared concerns about who is representing ‘indigenous peoples’ at the WSF, especially in its governance bodies, and what the appropriate processes for mandating such representation from indigenous peoples would be (Apurina, 2009; Dos Santos, 2008; Goldtooth, 2008) Related to this, the diversities and particularities arising from place-based, cultural, cosmological and linguistic differences among the political discourses and practices of indigenous movements render some of them more intelligible and recognizable as ‘political’ to movements and groups of civil society, including the leadership of the WSF. Some indigenous movements’ discourses are more articulated to those of major non-indigenous/Western/modern political traditions. Some, as in the case of CAOI (or the EZLN) have strong non-indigenous voices that can function effectively as interlocutors with non-indigenous movements. This can and does give these movements a certain privileged position ‘representing’ indigenous peoples in political spaces like the WSF IC.

13. For indigenous entities, the WSF is one site among a number of important international venues. Building or participating in the WSF does not appear to be an end in itself, but instrumental to the consolidation of an international indigenous movement, especially in the Americas. Secondly, the WSF is seen as a site for alliance building with non-indigenous movements. Further to this, there is some tension among indigenous organizers between their priorities with respect to building their own communities, organizations and networks of the indigenous movement, and their addressing a ‘wider’ movement. (This is also resonant with feminist concerns)

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