

The World Social Forum and the struggle for the pluriverse: 'Another world is possible' versus 'other worlds are present'

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"Another world is possible!" was the rallying cry of the inaugural World Social Forum in January 2001. Instantaneously, it seemed, it re-echoed around the world. It has since been taken up by oppositional social forces of all kinds far beyond its originary point of reference in the WSF. As Santos and others have observed, it responded powerfully to deep desires for a different possible future in a world where the ascent of neoliberalism had foreclosed any possibilities but its own.

In the 2005 WSF in Porto Alegre, after several years of extreme marginality, there was a significant mobilization of Indigenous peoples' participation in an initiative called PUXIRUM, in Tipi-Guarani meaning "a joining of efforts for a common goal". The slogan for PUXIRUM was "somos otro mundo": we are the other world.¹ Although reported in passing, this extraordinarily forceful and direct counter-claim to the WSF's creedal statement went largely unnoticed. It was so unheard, it didn't need to be forgotten.

In retrospect, it seems to me that this was an eruption of the pluriverse: another world breaking through, making itself audible on modern terrain, if only momentarily.

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Following the invitation in the Provocation paper to be attuned to events, "forming periodicities and patterns...[which] unhinge perceptions of the world that 'we' tend to perceive as common," I want to initiate an inquiry into the World Social Forum as such an event/pattern, one that might help us construct the present conjuncture (Grossberg) as one in which the world as a pluriverse is (again) coming into view. One of the features of this conjuncture and a condition of possibility for perception of the pluriverse is the unravelling of the 'modern constitution' (Latour).

My entry into this discussion of the pluriverse is via study of anti-globalization movements (AGM) in various of their diverse expressions, especially at the World Social Forum and including transnational feminist and indigenous movements. As suggested in the Provocation paper, some elements of the AGM, perhaps most clearly those associated with place-based politics, "disrupt the modernist storyline". However, in considering a practice like the World Social Forum, which is the single largest, most diverse and regular in-gathering of anti-globalization currents from different world

¹Significantly, the Spanish is ambiguous. It can also be translated "we are another world."

regions, this is by no means obvious. While diverse place-based subaltern movements are present, and their presence is growing, and their participation in transnational alliances is also growing, it is an open question as to whether more unambiguously modernist movements even perceive that there are translations across worlds taking place in the construction of intelligibility--and further, that the work of translation is largely one-way. To render themselves intelligible on the terrain of the AGM and WSF, the onus is on the 'others' to conduct their politics in the dominant grammar of these transnational discursive spaces, which is modern.

Where it occurs in the WSF, the visibilization of difference as *ontological* difference is largely in fleeting moments of incredulity, incomprehensibility or of partial connection (De la Cadena 2010) -- when one becomes aware of the equivocation (Viveirose de Castro 2004). They are like flashes, sparks created by colliding worlds, so fleeting you're not sure what happened. I am, of course, speaking from the modernist side. The 'others', I suspect, are in a permanent state of awareness of the equivocation when they interact on the terrain of the AGM/WSF.

Some Social Forum processes/events render ontological differences more rather than less visible. In my view, this is highly contingent on the place and the place-based politics of the organizing process. However, at the world level of the WSF process, and in its Brazilian iterations which I will discuss below, I see little evidence that ontological difference has been recognized, let alone politicized, by the dominant actors. (If others know of practices of translation across ontological difference, I look forward to hearing about them.) The struggle for another possible world, often termed one for 'counter-hegemonic globalization', is not necessarily one for the pluriverse.

In the context of this project, the WSF is a site to interrogate both the hegemony and the crisis of Euro-modern ontological assumptions, the challenges posed by ruptures from within as well as the unsettling and asymmetrical encounters with its exteriority, with colonial difference. More specifically, it provides an opportunity to examine the ongoing hegemony of the emancipatory discourses of modernity on the terrain of the AGM, the absences they effect, the emergences they enable, and a (perhaps new) set of questions about the (possible) status of (some of?) these traditions in a struggle for the pluriverse. Do they (some of them?) have an important future in enacting a particular world, a resignification of modernity, or an alternative modernity that, purged of its violent universalism, can co-exist beside other alternative or non-modernities, in an expanding pluriverse?

I am already departing somewhat, in emphasis at least, from Grossberg n.d; Blaser 2010., and Santos 2006 in questioning the extent to which the 'new social movements' of the late 20th century, including many anti-colonial movements, and many of today's 'anti-globalization' movements can be thought of as rejecting, or even problematizing 'modernity'. They are variously problematizing capitalism, white supremacy, male domination, heteronormativity, Western/Northern imperialism -- but modernity? While I agree with Blaser that ontological conflicts are coming more fully into view and are an important (maybe the most important) feature of struggles over the global age, I don't think we can simply or readily cast many of the struggles over globalization, or for counter-hegemonic globalization, as ontological conflicts.

To observe the persistence of Euro-modern standpoints in oppositional social movements, in the anti-globalizations movements, and in the WSF, of course, depends on one's working definition of modernity. In my thinking to date, I have relied on the formulations of the Modernity-Coloniality-Decolonial research group, particularly their concepts of the exteriority and colonial difference, supplemented with a more narrowly 'political' focus on the centrality of state-apparatuses, bureaucratic forms of organization, the rule of law -- whether of liberal or socialist varieties, as generalized features of modernity and modern politics. These are part of a complex institutional matrix that comprise a 'way of life' marked by expanding urbanization, wage economies, and alienation from subsistence, and that requires and produces modern individual subjectivities -- including as subjects of the discourses of rights and citizenship. Socialism, with its doctrines of developmentalism, productivism and progress is well within this paradigm.

Some of the most impressive movements on the anti-globalization terrain (eg., the MST², the World March of Women) evince thoroughly modern commitments in their discourses and practices--yet co-existing within the same movements are counter-tendencies, doubts, alter-experiments, or emergences. Movements are, by definition, moving, mutating works in progress. The same can be said of WSF, both in any one of its iterations and certainly as a global process. Maybe this mix of tendencies within and across movements, whose encounters are marked by conflicts, contradictions, incommensurabilities -- while also underpinned by a shared (although uneven) sense of their need for one another and their will to be together... helps us understand the global conjuncture and the potentialities of the AGM/WSF in terms of the struggle over globality as one for the pluriverse.

In this sense, the WSF is an expression of the rupturist story of globalization arising from within modernity (Blaser 2010, 9ff.): the convergence and interaction of intra-modernist tendencies becoming conscious of the specificity and limitations of their own world, beginning to have the capacity to question modern categories of thought and politics, and thus beginning to perceive colonial/ontological difference in their midst and to cultivate dispositions for the work of translation across ontological difference.

Conceiving the WSF *both* as a rupturist story arising from within modernity *and* as a contact zone between those critical, emancipatory forces and those social forces which have been rendered 'other', who exist at the exteriority as expressions of colonial difference, helps make some of the profound contradictions of the WSF productive analytically, and perhaps politically. As the Provocation paper aptly states: "the terrain is not clearly split into two camps (e.g., the universalizing apparatuses of Euro-modernity and the pluriversalizing multiple worlds) but rather is criss-crossed by allegiances, connections and connivances of all kinds." 6

Without the benefit of this nicely complex formulation, I confess to having felt increasingly caught in the crosshairs of these contradictions in my work on the WSF which, upon reflection, I see as having been pulled between two poles, which are

² The MST constructs place-based practices of autonomy and subsistence that co-exist with traditional, state-centered discourses of revolutionary left.

simultaneously analytical and political.³ The first has been is to defend the WSF against its detractors, to argue for its novelty and its generative power as a form and culture of politics that has broken in important ways with many of the assumptions of modernist politics of liberal and left varieties. I have been concerned to document its evolving practices, expanding inclusiveness, mutating place-based iterations and emerging alternative discourses -- to engage in a 'sociology of emergences'. This tendency in my work has included defending the WSF from theoretical capture, from too-easy incorporation into modernist political paradigms like 'global civil society' or the 'transnational public sphere' (Conway and Singh 2009).

The other pole, increasingly more powerful, has been to critique the WSF for the marginalizations and exclusions it is effecting, and their troubling persistence -- not only of particular kinds of bodies, but of knowledges otherwise, alternative insurgent knowledges arising from both within and beyond modernity-- to engage in a 'sociology of absences'. The risk in a sociology of absences is, in documenting the marginality of the 'other', one performs it and therefore contributes to it. This is a problem in much feminist work on the WSF, that in critiquing the marginality of feminism, invisibilizes feminism as one of the originary movements of the WSF (Conway 2007). The challenge is how to enact a sociology of absences that, rather than further amplifying them, turns the absences into emergences. So, in the context of "retransmitting" the WSF as an instantiation of the pluriverse, my question is about how to recognize and analyze the occlusion of ontological difference without further erasing its (shadowy) presence, while also avoiding the dangers of too easily incorporating it within modern regimes of truth.

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My concrete offering to this discussion is the beginnings of a study of indigenous positionality at the WSF with an eye to 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 place-based subaltern movements); 2. the presence and expression of traditional indigenous ontologies in the anti-globalization movement (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(s) in the AGM. In this paper, through an initial construction of the history of indigenous engagement in the SF process, primarily through the world-scale events in Brazil, I am attempting to discern the presence, character and enactment of those modern ontologies and to break open their implications.

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

³One recent work attempted to hold both poles in tension, examining the WSF as a 'contact zone' that is both cosmopolitan and colonial. This is available on the workshop web site.

Forum in Guatemala City in October 2008, and the WSF in Belem, Brazil in January 2009, although my attention to related issues at the WSF goes back to 2002. I have relied on interviews, my own participant-observation, and a thin body of literature--largely journalistic accounts. For the sake of space, I have omitted discussion here of methodological issues, my own positionality, and the various literatures in which I am thinking of situating this academically. I am also assuming basic knowledge of the World Social Forum.

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. Officially, indigenous persons number about 550,000 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, 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 International Council of the WSF and was closely involved in all aspects of the organizing of the Fora in Brazil, there was no specific policy or 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 attentive to such 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. 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 indigenous unity in diversity; the plurinational state; the possibility of co-existence without assimilation; their commitment to self-determination and self-representation; their demands for autonomy, collective rights to land, governance; administrative decentralization/pluralism; to social rights in culturally appropriate ways; their resistance to mega projects (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 their discourses were particular to that context-- for recognition of territorial rights, for land demarcation, for protection from invading settlers (Makuxi, Temb , Wapixana, et al. 2003, 180).

By 2003, according to Codas, there had developed a more explicit and conscious intention within the IC to "incorporate indigneous communities" but it remained the case that there was no indigneous presence in the Brazilian Organizing Committee. On the International Council, which had been created in June 2001 (and is in a semi-permanent state of expansion and contraction), there were officially two indigenous member organizations, CONAIE and Consejo Nacional del Indigena de Mexico. Only CONAIE participated with any regularity.

According to Codas,

the only general reference of the left in terms of the indigenous question here in Brazil... is CIMI, the Indigneous Missionary Council, of the national Conference of Brazilian Bishops. Thus there is a problem, because they are evangelists and not Indians there. This brings us to a problem in the indigneous question in Brazil, that this is no national indigenous organization that has recognition inside the left

and the social movements as representative of the whole of the indigenous (in Brazil), (or if there are some, these sectors of the left did not like them, because here in the indigenous movement in Brazil, there are many divergences... connections with companies,)

There were regional groupings in small centres close to their villages--not in Brasilia or Sao Paulo. But this raised the problem of resources to support their participation. We will return to the terms of this debate and their significance.

A critical focus on resource extraction has been growing steadily in the WSF, reflecting the intensification of these struggle 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 Guaraní discussed Shell and Enron's exploitation of petroleum resources on Guaraní 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. Víctor López, 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 Warã 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 and, to my eye,

helped expose the Western character of the WSF in Brazil, despite its positionality in the Global South.

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 indigneous activists including Goldtooth were invited to the WSF in Mumbai as part of the US-based Grassroots Global Justice network.⁴ There, he recounted, indigneous people from North America encountered others from Asia and Africa, we 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 ambivalent, wondering whether participation was a good use of their resources and whether it advanced their commitment to base-building. The absence of indigenous involvement in the organizing also gave them pause:

“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 indigneous people 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 nearby 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 of the indigenous movement; at which time, we worked primarily with COICA⁵. 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

⁴GGJ would later go on to be a major organizing force for the 2007 US Social Forum in Atlanta, which had an expecially explicit anti-colonial praxis and was marked by significant leadership and participation of indigenous peoples.

⁵COICA 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

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 Yala⁶ 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.⁷

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 circulated in indigenous networks 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

⁶ 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).

⁷ 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.

lecturers in some events. This is the first time that indigenous people take part with a specific activity", says Rona.

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.⁸

⁸Language translation of events into the 'official' languages of the WSF, which in Brazil are Portuguese, Spanish, English and French, is a highly uneven, contingent on the self-organizing capacities of convening groups and or the volunteer initiative of those present in any particular event. This is a generalized problem in the Forum but the

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 CAOÍ⁹, 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 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, the IC and the Belem organizing committee both were committed to assure a significant presence of indigenous peoples especially those of the Amazon, 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 statement¹⁰ 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.¹¹ It also by-passed a pre-existing initiative based in Belém and

absolute absence of language translation in the PUXIRUM space on the day of my attendance seemed to further testify to its marginality.

⁹Coordinadora Andina de las Organizaciones Indigenas -- discussed more fully below.

¹⁰See (Courteille and Mestrum 2008) for an English rendition of the text.

¹¹ 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 bio-diversity that made the Amazon region globally important. There is much more to

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 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:¹² 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

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.

¹² 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.

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 indigenous 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 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 having to do with the Forum autonomy from political parties, 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)

Belém 2009: 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).

In the lead-up, this WSF was billed by its organizers 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. 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 prominent in ways unprecedented in the WSF.

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 Belém. 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.

Belem and beyond: is the global justice movement colonial?

Like any World Social Forum, the event in Belém eludes definitive analysis. The WSF 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. Since then, its prevailing discourses are of 'inviting 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. This provokes troubling questions about the imaginary underpinning the WSF's politics of "inclusion" through its "expansion" commission. It recalls the recurring observation by feminists and others that the WSF as a pre-constituted entity remains fundamentally untroubled, i.e., it is not itself de-stablized or forced to reconstitute itself, as it incorporates new 'others'.
2. '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).¹³ At the same time, indigenous persons/peoples seems to occupy a special status as particularly favoured icons of the movement. In Belem, the faces of Amazonian Indigenous persons became central icons of the event, as seen in the posters around the city and in the on-line masthead of the WSF -- even as their participation in the planning processes was very late and their effect on the event and its discourses as a whole, debatable. What is at stake for groups of settler/civil society in these representations of the movement of movements and the WSF?
3. Where indigenous people were actually present in the early years, as occasional presenters and as artisans and performers, their incorporation appears highly tokenistic and or exoticizing. Even more recently, when Indigenous people are present in larger

¹³I am borrowing this fecund term from Bakan but using it differently.

numbers and with coordinated and forceful political discourses, individuals are constantly objectified by being photographed by non-indigenous others.

The recent auto-critique emerging from the IC of the WSF's past history of reducing Indigenous peoples' participation to the 'folkloric' is double-edged in that distinctively Indigenous modes of 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 so-called folkloric by the left can be a demand to act/speak/dress as 'we' do so that we can deal with you politically.

4. Many calls for participation and declarations by indigenous people, in the WSF and more generally, start from an assertion of their presence on their territories since time immemorial and their shared experience 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, was there any recognition of Brazil or other nations of the Americas as colonial societies, founded on the theft of indigenous land and destruction of Indigenous societies.

5. 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' movements 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.¹⁴

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 overwhelming 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

¹⁴See (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."

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'.

within the global justice movement (or within 'global civil society, and the relations between these two constructs.) Anti-imperialist and or anti-capitalist politics confer innocence on questions of race.

7. The WSF is constituted (unproblematically) as a civil society space in that it is autonomous of states, parties, and armed groups. However, 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. 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.

8. Another aspect of the modern civil society character of the WSF as manifested in its troubled interactions with Indigenous peoples is the search by the WSF IC for Indigenous entities in Brazil organized in a such a way (as a formally-constituted organization) and at such a scale (preferably national), whose politics were intelligible (and acceptable) to the left and with which it could negotiate Indigenous representation with itself. The small-scale, remote from the cities, and community-based character of indigenous life in Brazil rendered it 'fragmented', inaccessible and unintelligible politically.

9. The prevalence of rights discourses in the global civil society of the WSF has provided some 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).

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 value and effectiveness of separate indigenous spaces with their own self-organized program in the WSF versus having their presence and discourses more dispersed through the site, circulating among the other movements. This is related to an evident tension between using the WSF as a space to consolidate their own continental, sub-regional, and women's indigenous movements versus advancing relationships with specific other non-indigenous movements or intervening on the terrain of the WSF as a whole.

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)

13. Related to the preceding point, 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 and access to the resources for organizing indigenous representation.

14. 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)

15. Where are decolonizing politics evident or emerging in the anti-globalization movement? They may be emerging in very partial and contradictory ways in some particular movements and organizations, particularly where there is a sizable social base of indigenous people--as in some 'peasant' or campesino movements and in some quarters of women's movements. In some regional expressions of the Social Forum in the Americas, there have been different (but also strikingly overlapping) histories of practice vis-a-vis local indigenous movements (eg., Ecuador, Guatemala, US) that have allowed indigenous difference to come more fully into view.

16. This leads to questions of the specificity of coloniality (past and present) in the Americas (vis-a-vis other world regions), country-specific histories of colonialism, indigenous survival and resistance, and political discourses in the present of anti-colonialism, indigenous sovereignty, anti-racism and their articulation to other social movements and to left politics in Latin America, and to differences on all these fronts between Latin America and other parts of the Americas (the Caribbean, North America). What is the proper (or most promising) site/scale at which to study the question of coloniality and the global justice movement through the lens of the positionality of indigenous peoples?

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