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Moving For(u)ms: Translating the Cultural Politics of the World Social Forum

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Introduction

The rapid expansion of neoliberalism has catalysed a growing resistance to its different agendas within nation states. In response to the spreading influence of these frameworks, populations marginalized by these policy shifts have been using the same communication networks of neoliberal capitalism to mount an increasingly transnational, networked set of resistances to different manifestations of this agenda. As Keck and Sikkink (1998) argue, transnational advocacy networks are nothing new. These authors extensively describe the transnationality of different anti slavery and anti colonial networks in the middle of the 19th Century. What is new, however, is the thickness and speed of these linkages today. With communications technologies facilitating a compression of space and time (Castells 1997) for those on the information superhighway, there is a virtual explosion of information exchange and strategy building among different groups fighting the privatization of natural and social services. Transnational networks of indigenous peoples organizations, child rights groups and victims of racism have recently managed to effect and organise UN level consultations and strategy meetings. By sharing and exchanging these kinds of information, activists are now actively forwarding multiple locations and forms of knowledge to grant legitimacy, and indeed power to their constituencies. While some of these organizations invoke a cultural politics to resist this hegemony, others groups use the universalizing language of rights and democracy to open up spaces of intervention and contestation.

Even more interesting is the trend, in recent years, for groups to move beyond their particular crisis narratives to organize against the symptoms of neoliberalism, such as increasing

inequality and the erosion of rights, to critiquing neoliberalism itself. This enables groups to make linkages with a variety of other movements and organizations effecting similar critiques. The tremendously successful protests around the World Trade Organisation's meetings in Seattle in November 1999 marked a starting point for what is now a ritualized and rather predictable set of protests that surround meetings of multilateral financial institutions that take place in places as distant as Bangkok, Barcelona and Boston.

Increasingly, the forms and forums of these protests are convergent. Some participants call these events 'Carnivals against Capitalism'. Surrounding such events are exuberant, vibrant reclamations of public space by multitudes that mobilize and unite around particular days of action called to protest specific institutions or policies. Transnational forms of protest and organisation are tremendously interesting, in part because they, like the ideas of economic capitalization, require to be translated into 'global' cultures to have wider appeal, as well as make sense to participating 'local' populations.

As an international event that just concluded its fourth meeting, the World Social Forum¹ is one such event and process. When the WSF International Committee decided to move the Forum to Mumbai, India, it was seen as an effort to globalize the tremendously successful experiments with open non-hegemonic space at Porto Alegre, Brasil, where the first three WSFs had been held.² Already, by 2003, several successful regional forums had been held. The

¹ The 'official' website of the World Social Forum can be accessed at <http://www.worldsocialforum.org>. A number of important documents and analyses can be found at this website.

² Emotionally and intellectually, I was heavily invested in this process. Born and raised in Mumbai before going to the United States for university, I returned to Mumbai after working with groups organizing what then became the Battle of Seattle. When I returned to Mumbai in 1999 to learn from and work with youth groups trying to understand the impact of economic globalization, I was required to learn different forms

European Social Forum in Florence, the Asian Social Forum in Hyderabad and the African Social Forum in Bamako had drawn on a large diversity of peoples from their respective continents. Moving the World Social Forum to Mumbai was simultaneously an expression of global solidarity as it was a test for its open unstructured and chaotic spaces. Many questioned whether these could be as successfully used by different constellations of groups to build alliances, programs of work and personal relations based on their common interests.³

As the form of globalization protests around the world is itself globalised, it undergoes some cultural reconfiguration and transformation. Through this paper, I seek to interrogate the ways in which the World Forum was reconfigured by its move to India and ways in which the political cultures of the forum interrogated social practices in India. Following Slater (1998: 381), I argue that “the cultural framing of 'doing politics', has become a key theme of enquiry which can be expanded and rethought by incorporating a spatial imagination”. To do this analysis, I will venture towards an analysis of the Forum using the dialectic of space and spatial transformation. This paper will grapple with the successes and difficulties of translation of the World Social Forum as it moved from the cultural politics of Brasil, to that of India.

of cultural and political expression for a similar set of problems with the expansion of global capitalism. Subsequent experiences at Porto Alegre in 2003 left me exhilarated and curious. With the Forum scheduled to move from Brazil to Mumbai, I was anxious to see how its politics of representation and multiplicity translated into what is a far more hierarchical structure of Indian social action- that is how, and if the cultures of the forum shifted.

³ By most indications, the World Social Forum was a tremendous success. It drew people from Africa and Asia in a way that the previous Forums were not able to do, situated a significant opposition to militarisation close to the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq and reaffirmed the principles of plurality and justice in a city and near a state which had experienced the worst kind of violence against religious minorities. Moreover, by the accounts of its participants, the World Social Forum provided an opportunity for participants to build networks and visibility for the different issues that they were working on even as it revitalized and energized their spirits.

Theoretical Framework- Cultural Politics

In their book *Cultures of Politics/ Politics of Cultures*, Alvarez, Dagnino and Escobar credit Stuart Hall for situating politics in cultural practice and theory. Urging that the

tension between the textual and that which underlies it, between representation and its grounding, between meanings and practices, between narratives and social actors, between discourse and power can never be resolved in the terrain of theory, (Alvarez et al 1998:5)

they urge theorists pay attention to the activities of social movements, and the ways in which they frame their cultural practices. For Alvarez, Dagnino and Escobar, cultural politics is concerned with the ways in which subjective social relationships situated in popular practices legitimize or delegitimize power relations.

Of course, which sets of power relationships are deemed acceptable or not vary greatly across different cultures, and are also dependent on the ways in which social movements or civil societies are able to denaturalize these power discrepancies. For example, power relationships of inequality of gender, sexuality, class and race are different in different places. Thus, according to Slater, “Archipelagos of resistance and reverse discourses have the potential to be connected across space, but they are also distinct, specific, and embedded in local and regional contexts have emerged in many different societies” (Slater 1998: 380). Whereas the task is already difficult when attempting to do this across relationships of domination within the nation state, engaging transnational audiences to do so requires a negotiation of different cultural politics as groups struggle to find idioms and meanings that translate across these cultural differences.

The expanding sphere of transnational communication networks means that even local social movements can reach and affect global audiences. In order to do so, they are required to engage with global imaginaries and identities- those which are more frequently fixed by actors in the global North. In this situation, many local struggles reproduce their localness while also reaching out toward perceived universal themes so as to connect wider audiences. Thus, in Nicaragua, the mothers of Matagalpa were mobilized within their traditional gender roles (as grieving mothers of slain soldiers) so as to generate support for Sandinistas (deVolo 2000:144). Using the universal symbol of the grieving mother, they produced images of helplessness even as they expanded their self-help projects and micro-loans. In doing so, they mobilized both local and international support for their causes.

Another discursive category through which people attempt to denaturalize relationships of domination and exploitation is that of indigeneity. Effectively making claims to a transnational audience for being ecologically sustainable in their practical everyday uses of resources, indigenous peoples worldwide have gained land rights and access to natural resources in the face of resource extraction projects (see Conklin 1997, Conklin and Graham 1995, Tsing 1999). Absorbing the identity of a people ‘poor in resources but rich in intelligence’, indigenous leaders in Bolivia consistently wear their indigeneity (quite literally) on their sleeve so as to open more spaces to exercise their power. This process shows how “the principles and practices that emerge in globalised space evoke local responses that transform and contest global practices in their applications” (Guidry, Kennedy, and Zald 2000: 7).

Sometimes however, the decision to enact a local cultural politics does not map as easily on to the international arena. Pan-mayanists in Guatemala did not see their concerns represented in the protests against capitalism (Warren 1998: 167). Warren describes the alienation of pan-

mayan groups at a regional conference that had adopted the universalizing language of oppression by capitalism. The Pan-Mayan movement was based in education, language, cultural affirmation and collective rights. Though the total domination of transnational corporations was an ideal environment for nurturing transnational popular movements (Wilson and Whitmore 1998), this framework was not of use to pan-Mayanists who were struggling against different obstacles in their project to make more visible Mayan culture. Their experiences show that critiques of neoliberalism sometimes require activists to use frames that are not very interesting and appropriate to their own programs of work. ‘Globalised resistance’, therefore has to simultaneously ensure that its globalization does not create the same effects of alienation and rigidity as the systems of globalization they are struggling against.

The World Social Forum- Beginnings

The World Social Forum first crystallized in 2001 as a counter summit to the World Economic Forum- a meeting of business leaders and the heads of more powerful national governments. With the WEF perceived as a bastion which like the MAI and the WTO found selected leaders “drafting the constitution of a single global economy” (Renato Ruggiero, Director-General, World Trade Organization), the idea of a counter summit gained currency in 1999, when representatives from the Brazilian Business Association for Citizenship, the Brazilian Justice and Peace Commission and ATTAC France proposed a social forum, to be held in the global south at the same time as the WEF (Fisher and Ponnaiah 2003: 7). Those that participate in the World Social Forum are united in their opposition to neoliberal economic globalization. They are also “to uphold respect for human rights, the practices of real democracy, participatory democracy, peaceful relations, in equality and solidarity, among

people, ethnicities, genders and peoples, and condemn all forms of domination and all subjugation of one person by another.” (WSF Charter of Principles *in* Fisher and Ponniah, 2003: 354).

The first World Social Forum attracted about ten thousand activists from around the world. In 2002, approximately fifty thousand people participated. By the time the third forum concluded in January 2003, the Forum attracted over one hundred thousand people from over 150 countries. As groups converged in their opposition “to neoliberalism and to domination of the world by capital” (World Social Forum Charter of Principles), they came from a variety of social, cultural and political histories. Building on the widespread appeal of converging protests against the World Bank, IMF and the World Trade Organization, the World Social Forum meetings have brought people from groups as diverse as the Brazilian Landless Movement, the Canadian Autoworkers Union, Greenpeace and Indian mineworker unions from the state of Chhatisgarh to a shared event from which they draw and to which they bring support.

The growing opposition to structural adjustment and neoliberal trade regimes has been instrumental in bringing together loose coalitions protesting these processes. Seeing that they have little control over emerging global regimes, these political alliances are made at the periphery of global decision making (Robbins 2000). In doing so, they form what Fortun (2001) calls enunciatory communities.⁴ “Sharing certain interests and yet thinking differently”, they embrace “fields of force and contradiction” (Fortun 2001: 11). As such these communities are

⁴ Fortun’s understanding of an enunciatory community builds on that of Tania Li, who understands community as a “strategically deployed category that can be used to politically unify or divide groups and locations. Division and unity move across a constantly changing political map of social process”. (Li (1996) *in* Robbins 2000:196-7)

difficult to analyze. Sharing different cultures, they are not bound in space or time. Nor do they share a specific ideology. Yet, participants each come to the Forum with their own cultural politics, which they knowingly or unknowingly engage to take issues beyond decontextualised protests of neoliberalism, and into a variety of different (sometimes contradictory) directions based on their specific experiences.

Foundations of the Forum

There are specific reasons why the World Social Forum as a practice, first emerged in Brasil. Over the last several decades, those working for social justice in Brasil have been involved in creating partnerships in the relatively small political space left open to them in a period of neoliberalism protected by military dictatorships and multinational extractive industries. Compared to a country like India, where the spaces of civil society experienced a dramatic opening following independence, similarly 'independent' societies in Brasil had little access to such democratic spaces. With a few people maintaining a stronghold on the Brazilian economy, much of political society and political practice was possible only for these certain groups.

For the last several decades, environmentalists, liberation theologians and labour organizations have been working patiently to open such spaces. With a considerable degree of success over the last two decades, and a transition to democracy, social movements have reorganized resistances to neoliberalism by using expanded notions of citizenship to effect operationalise democracy to define the very boundaries of what constitutes political society (Dagnino 1998). Environmental movements, labor organizations, landless movements and indigenous peoples have been strategizing and acting in coordination in a number of ways that

privilege democratic practice and the multiplicity of identity and place over the necessity for single comprehensive ideology.

Recently, a feature of organized social movements in Brazil is that they “allow us to envision a path that might transform values and conceptions of power and politically authoritarian social hierarchies through widened participation in rules governing the common good” (Paoli 1998: 85). Thus, labour unions, liberation theologians, indigenous peoples and rubber tappers have worked together to create and open spaces of participation where values and power structures may be collectively interrogated.

Political Culture in India

Emerging out of a different social history and political culture, the openings of such political space were the target of, and largely achieved by a relatively recent anti-colonial movement. With these spaces already experiencing a dramatic expansion following independence, coalitions and networks have since been working on developing and defining transformative *ideologies* to facilitate social transformation. Political parties and social movements selectively engage different theories of Marx and Mao, Gandhi, Ambedkar and Phule to emerge with complex articulations of ideology which if internalized and acted upon by populations would transform society.

This post-colonial political history and landscape has rendered two factors extremely important- those of nationalism and ideology. Emerging from different national independence struggles, social movements across the political spectrum in India continue to valorize *swadeshi* (or ‘of the same country’) over *videshi* (of different countries) resources, which are treated with suspicion and inclined to be attributed with negative interests and ulterior motives. As the

frameworks of nationalism continuing to remain strong, social movements and organizations risk stigmatization and rejection should their activities be perceived to be directed by non-national actors.

Yet, this form of cultural politics does make room for a range of *videshi ideologies* of the left- especially those of Marx and Lenin. Enjoying special relationships with both the Soviet Union and China, the Indian state announced, in the 1950s that it too was a socialist republic. Giving both space and recognition to much of the communist party (which even today is in power in two states), and ideological space to some more radical and violent Leninist insurgents, the political cultures of India see transformation achieved by the masses, or ‘the people’ when they follow revolutionary tenets and ideologies created and innovated by Marxist intelligentsia that develop comprehensive theory. As such, political discourse is situated outside of its intended agents. Though words of thinkers are to open and reflect on the experiences of the masses, they are outside of this consciousness.⁵

Albeit complex, ideology aspires towards a unity- a single representation of truth and way to see and act in the world whereby change is achieved through the processes of slow but significant conscientisation. A process of conscientisation (Gramsci 1971), also promises ultimately results in a unification of the minds and the bodies of social movements. There is a strong tradition of physically ‘standing with the people’ in India. Those that do not speak theory perform their oppressions using their bodies to play on the politics of conscience- an art learnt from the passive resistance of the anti-colonial struggle and subsequently inherited by many

⁵ For an extensive description of this phenomenon, see Graeber 2004.

social movements (Appadurai 2002). Rather than diverse movements to create intellectual space, (as is the case with Brasil), in India, intellectuals mobilize spaces for communiqué-ting political ideology. In other words, it is comprehensive ideology that legitimates political action in spaces, whereas political action or the mobilization of space to *create* ideologies is viewed with suspicion.

A Matter of Translation

For many from these Old-er Social Movement traditions in India, the plurality promised by Porto Alegre- the creation of a space without a specific ideology was problematic, and a betrayal of the causes to which they believed in- including the primacy of national sovereignty, class struggle, and militant organization.⁶ Though there have been some India level experiments with providing an space for social movements and NGOs campaigning on different issues to talk about common threats and problems,⁷ it was not until the World Social Forum inspired Asian Social Forum in Hyderabad that social movements and NGOs opposed to neoliberalism could meet in such diversity in a common space irrespective of their ideology and funding histories. Most efforts to do so before the Forum required groups to affirm a similar set of values in relation to the state and market, as well as agree to a common platform for future declarations and actions. This agreement was sometimes implicit (in the form and organization of the event), and sometimes explicit (in terms of who was invited to participate).

⁶ Rather than take part in this event, that were especially steeped in these traditions did organize a parallel event called Mumbai Resistance, declaring 'a socialist world' was the only one possible.

⁷ In 1986, the Harsud Meet was intended to bring together movements for social chance. A similar effort was intended at the 2000 Panchgani Conference on Human Rights and Globalization.

As was to be expected, there were many who saw the convergence of diverse people from diverse ideologies as a betrayal of the causes and issues they were struggling for. As ideologies contaminated each other, they were rendered ineffective, useless and unreliable in their fluidity. Even in Porto Alegre in 2003, one of the representatives of the Indian labor movement declared that there was no such thing as a ‘new’ social movement in India, and that the problem with groups that called themselves as such that they lacked ideology (Gautam Modi, Tensions between New and Old Social Movements, World Social Forum January 2003). The World Social Forum as an ideology-less space for those critical of capitalism made little sense. For this Modi, operating within a heterogenous political space, new movements, characterized by a politics of diversity and difference did not draw on historic ideologies of class struggle and therefore could not be considered valid, legitimate movements that were consistent in their approaches. What made matters more unpalatable too, was the involvement of international donors and NGOs- further evidence that local agendas were being co-opted by transnational interests. Critiquing those coming from ‘outside’ as illegitimate, and ‘not with the people’ and of a mixed ideology, many activists saw the forum as a hidden manifestation of transnational capitalism.

Workshop Space

A critical and significant component of the World Social Forum is its workshops.⁸

Primarily self-organized and administered by participants at the Forum, the last two Forums each

⁸ Noteworthy is that in the Mumbai WSF, the ‘Testimonials’ all but disappeared, even from the website of the 2004 forum. Using an analysis similar to the ones I would develop for workshops in this section, I argue that this is because social organisation in India privileges an analysis of group experience mediated through the leadership over that of the individual.

hosted upwards of one thousand workshops over the four day event. These workshops are varied and different. Though Forum administrators try to order them by theme, and serve as instruments of information exchange across different workshops, there is considerable autonomy in their content. Through workshops, organizations gain both unexpected audiences and future partners as they draw people in to their themes of interest. As one of the more significant activities at the Forum, they also serve as good idioms to examine the successes and differences that emerge as the ideas of the World Social Forum as space that needed to be translated from Porto Alegre to Bombay.

While there were hundreds of workshops in Porto Alegre, a considerable amount of attention was given to organizing workshops that drew in different enunciatory communities to open and develop forms of collaboration that were outside of the networks groups were already participating in. For example, there were open panels on ‘Principles and Values’, ‘Democratic World Order’ and ‘Sustainable Development’. These panels defied emerging with crisis narratives and strategies that groups had been engaging with for a while, if only to reach a broader audience.

More importantly, there were also workshops that were specifically engaging on themes of tension and difference. The official program committee had organized workshops around five themes, including those on. All the workshops it organized fell within these themes, and were structured to be continuous with each other through the duration of the Forum. One of these themes focused exclusively on an area entitled ‘Political Power, Civil Society and Democracy’. In it, panels were extensively focused on exploring tensions and new opportunities for different actors to come together, and exploring new ways of organizing for this- an acknowledgment of the different, yet simultaneously valid frameworks through which allies fighting neoliberalism

collaborated. I have described the significance of these workshops in another paper (see Anand 2004), but in short, they enabled disparate groups to challenge each other and engage with misconceptions and problems of representation that may have existed before this engagement. Further, rather than have critiques silenced by the “tyranny of the emergency” workshops embody a different politics- “a politics of patience” (Appadurai 2002: 30), through which groups can explore the different premises and common grounds of values and process which are otherwise not possible in more structured meetings and protest events. Through the open space of the workshop, different groups can explore possibilities of alliance building and contestation.

Yet, compared to the previous forums in Porto Alegre, there was less emphasis on exploring the tensions between different forms of representation and marginalization at the World Social Forum 2004 in Mumbai. There were several workshops on issues like caste oppressions of dalit groups, or the struggles to organise garment workers. But there were few conversations between labour, gender and environmental movements. The success of groups doing this in Porto Alegre, was in part due to their to the accumulated experience of the past forums. However, this was also a kind of engagement that was lost in cultural translation as the forum travelled to Bombay.

Unlike in Brasil, there is less collaboration and dialogue between spatially dissipated, ideologically different social movements.⁹ At the workshops on child rights, for example,

⁹ Wallerstein and Arrighi see another reason for this lack of coordination between different anti-systemic movements. They identify a sustained expansion of neoliberal capitalism as critical to building alliances across different marginalized groups. India, which only recently stepped up the pace of this process, it is argued is only just beginning to create and expand these dialogues and increasing coordination between different movements

Urmila Salunkhe found participants to primarily be taking part in their professional capacity as members of institutions working on these issues. While workshops prior to the WSF engaged the same subset of people working on policy, the WSF workshops in Mumbai served to expand the geographic spread of the participants as well as serve to bring in more information of how policies differed across countries (Urmila Salunkhe, personal communication). Coming out of the workshops, Salunkhe found Child Rights groups emerging with specialized rights networks on labour, sexwork, homelessness etc. For many participants, the approach to the forum was less of being a flaneur and more of attending events which existing networks had already contacted participants about. When they chose to attend workshops, many chose to do so based on existing institutional or personal relationships. Workshops therefore worked more towards engaging and building existing relationships rather than critically reconfiguring or interrogating them in any significant way.

Roll Call

Aside from the content of the workshops being more homogenous and an extension of already existent practices of networking and alliance building, the movement of workshops to Mumbai also resulted in a dramatic fall in attendance. The innovativeness of Porto Alegre was that it provided structured spaces for those wishing to exchange ideas, stories and experiences. The Mumbai WSF was noteworthy because a significant number of those attending rejected the specialized spaces of discussion and theorisation to a large extent. Instead they chose to situate their bodies in the chaos of the bazaars and stalls selling different materials, their voices were heard in the medley and noisy percussion of the streets that connected different venues, and information was exchanged interacting with accidental acquaintances and chosen ones in a series

of informal eating and resting spaces around the forum. Therefore where the Porto Alegre Forum found much of its vibrancy and diversity within workshop spaces, those at the Mumbai event found these in the streets and eating spaces around the venue, leading many to dismiss the event as a large *mela* or market fair, rather than a ‘movement’ for social change.

In this paper, I propose two different reasons for this change and effective reconfiguration of Forum activities. First, is an issue of tongues spoken at the meet. With most workshops in English and sometimes Hindi, and with the translation equipment breaking down, there was a serious and genuine inability of many to access the ideas being communicated at the forum. Second, beyond the issue of ‘tongues’, there is an issue of language. I propose that this shift took place because the discourse within workshops was dissynchronous with the people mobilized to attend them. This was both a function of the ways in which political mobilization takes place in India and much of South Asia as well as the structural limitations of workshops and the kinds of information exchange they facilitate.

Unlevel Fields

Of different sizes, workshop spaces were conventionally organized in a seminar format—four chairs and a table for the speakers on a raised platform around which were organized different numbers of chairs for the audience.¹⁰ Within workshops, participants were divided into people that speak and people that listen. They privilege the knowledges of a few over others.

¹⁰ The WSF-India Program Committee organized the larger of these events, which were typically held in halls with a seating capacity of over five thousand. Yet evenly spread through the WSF ‘Campus’ were over 1500 other workshops, each of which was organized around resistances to different forms of domination, discrimination and injustice. Unlike previous WSFs these spaces were organised and publicised with a significant degree of flexibility and accommodation.

The very structure of workshops is predicated on providing unidirectional information to assist the audience with processing their experiences and strategizing their futures, while silencing the experiences, voices and perspectives of the audience.

Those on the dais in most of the events at the World Social Forum were leaders. If not public intellectuals and famous activists, then they were the heads of different, hierarchical social movements or the intelligentsia from political parties, mostly well trained in addressing large audiences and fielding a few minutes of questions at the end. At the seminar on Academic Research and Social Movements, as well as in other workshops, there was some dissent voiced at presentations in this format, and efforts were made to ‘level’ the talking field by physically reconfiguring the space of the workshop.

Therefore, predicated on workshops, the organisation of the World Social Forum itself consolidates an inconsistency. Despite asserting that all and diverse voices are equally valid, it is especially mindful of the voices, and differences of those selected by some to speak.¹¹ While the World Social Forum marks a tremendous expansion of non-hierarchical spaces, its primary instruments are nevertheless constrained by the idea that some people can do better analysis and deliver clearer insights than others.

Whether this is true empirically or intuitively is aside from my reasons for flagging this issue. The problem emerges in the manner and effect of this differentiation. Frequently, this is seen as a divide between the heads and minds of societies speaking to the bodies- those who are assumed to enact different forms of uncritical resistance. This has been a source of much tension

¹¹ That said, workshops, in their smaller forms do allow for a significantly greater degree of exchange when compared to large seminars and other structured speaking spaces.

among many in social movements. Some, like Sanjay Sangvai, a support activist of the Narmada Bachao Andolan, found problematic the assumed “dichotomy between academics who think and activists who work” (Workshop on Academic Research and Social Movements, WSF Mumbai, January 18, 2004).

The division between the heads and bodies of social movements is problematic even within many social movements- most of which continue to have some form or organizational structure which delegates to the leadership a significant degree of decision making power. In India, the primacy of ideology, and its cultural politics is manifested in a clear separation between the leaders of social movements and NGOs and the party cadre- most specifically when it comes to theorizing and formulating strategies and actions. As I have described in an earlier section, the cultural politics of social change organizations sees spaces such as the WSF not as spaces in which they have challenged specific frameworks of thoughts and action, but instead spaces to effect a conversion- a transformation of ‘unenlightened masses’ to conscientised and revolutionary populations.

Seeing the WSF as an important space, which could achieve these ends, movements and NGOs mobilized thousands of their constituency to attend the forum by the busload. Recognizing their significance as bodies, and as support bases for organizations and movements doing credible work, many agreed to come to, and see the phenomenon that was the World Social Forum. Yet for these participants, the workshop space- of intellectualization and theorization was unfamiliar terrain that most frequently was dealt with and by their leaders. Actively engaging with systemic issues, the language of such workshops was effectively exclusive and frequently disconnected from experiences of participants. Confronted with these

asymmetries, many stepped out of workshop spaces and in to the marches of the street, where their functions and purposes were more familiar.

Fair Street Fair

In the 'streets' and pathways around the Forum grounds, these experiences were far more diverse and equalizing. It is important to note that these relationships of equality existed in a larger framework of structural inequality. Yet with organizers insisting with the need to keep this space open and uncontrolled, the algebra of bodies allowed for more democratic and fluid expressions that both challenged and shaped an otherwise familiar cultural politics. Through the four days of the Forum, the streets were filled with diverse protests and marches- ranging from those fighting for forest rights in Assam to others demanding an end to the violence in Palestine.

Unlike the monopoly of red flags and unitary chants of *morchas* (marches) in India, the spaces of the WSF were filled with a diversity of protestors, each using their own unique cultural traditions of protest. With drums, music and dance, dalit groups from Gujarat, Korean trade unionists, Thai church groups and Naga tribals celebrated their resistance.¹² Moving through the forums 'streets,' participants appropriated the uncontrolled space of the street to become one part of a larger carnival¹³ of resistance- one that had been experienced in Porto Alegre and in different anti-globalization protests around the world. Its unorganization,

¹² In response to this lack of focus, some groups, such as the revolutionary writings association declared, imperialism is neither fun nor picnic but a life and death struggle" (see Sen 2004).¹² The criticism of the forum as 'picnic' and a reaffirmation for a socialist world is as much a criticism of the participation of distinctly reformist NGOs in the forum, as it is a criticism of the enthusiastic parading and celebration of struggle that filled the WSF venue through the course of the conference.

¹³ In Brazil, the history of the Carnival is itself steeped in traditions of protest and resistance.

spontaneity and exuberance is a form of politics that is new and inspiring for a host of participants from India, especially the 'rank and file' of many social movements who stayed away from listening to lectures about their challenges to learn of new ones in these different marches.

This chaotic diverse space marks a certain moment in the history of Indian social movements when the nationalist discourses of class struggle were not able to withstand the humanity of an intensely global experience. As people came to accidentally learn of a more diverse and complex landscape of discriminations and domination they eagerly sought to build fraternal links with others from around the world.

These cosmopolitanisms were being built from below- by dancing in the streets, participating in street theatre and marching in a range of different solidarity marches. As participants moved politics from structured spaces of hierarchy into plural and non hegemonic performances of practice that were spontaneous and messy, they constituted a critical, albeit immeasurable effect of the Forum and its processes.

Conclusion

For the Indian social change organizations that were participating, the World Social Forum 2004 marked an important moment in recent history where a nationalist and fragmentary political practice was confused, and to a degree challenged, by the diversity of peoples experiences at the Forum. The idea of an open, non-controlled international space for the interaction of different social movements emerged from Brasil. While there was some enthusiasm for this concept among groups in India, many used the workshops to do what they

did in more structured efforts outside of and prior to the Forum- that is present ideological frameworks and campaigns for organizing and conscientisation.

The rank and file of many social movements avoided these workshop spaces altogether because their language was exclusive in more ways than one. By acting and interacting on the streets outside of these spaces, they instead enjoyed shaping their own political and personal cosmopolitanisms that they will be remembered and perhaps taken back and communicated with others that did not come to the forum.

Avoiding the workshop in favor of the demonstration is a direct effect of enacting and reinforcing Indian political cultures through which attention is called to resistances by people using their bodies as tools for visibility, legitimacy and dissent. On one hand, this suggests that participants in India were not as interested in moving beyond their particular crises to intellectualize and imagine a comprehensive ‘another world’. That the workshop spaces to do this were so exclusive point to problems that are structural to the modes of discourse, and also to the modes of social organization in India. The incredible usefulness of workshop spaces in Porto Alegre to do this may have been lost in translation. On the other hand, the rejection of these spaces in favour of the messy, chaotic, more dialogical and physically situated experience of the street suggests that for many participants, the ‘other world’ was already present at the World Social Forum.

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