

Globalization, Indigenism, Social Movements, and the Politics of Place

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Abstract

One of the most important and ironic products of the most recent round of economic globalization has been to enhance, foster, and render visible consciousness of place. The concern with places is evident in the proliferation of academic literature on the subject, in popular culture, and above all in the social movements that have become an increasingly powerful force in national and global politics. The concern comes in many guises, informed by different political visions. My interest here is in the way places are envisioned in relation-ship to two other paradigmatic phenomena of our times, indigenism and social movements. More than any other political and cultural orientation currently available, indigenism offers an indispensable critical perspective on the hegemonic assumptions that inform globalization. Social movements, on the other hand, offer a means to linking places in larger wholes that are important not only for overcoming the parochialism that is the predicament of place-based politics but also to answer to the demands of sustenance within political economic spaces that of necessity transcend places.

Keywords: Places, Globalization, Indigenism, Social Movements, Ecology

One of the most important and ironic products of the most recent round of economic globalization has been to enhance, foster, and render visible consciousness of place. Capital as a very condition of its globalization has had to “place” itself in order to produce and market its products, as is visible in the transnational corporations that assume different names and different guises in response to real or imagined local differences. The people uprooted and transformed by those very same activities have become more keenly aware of the connection between place and livelihood even as they have been forced to trot the globe in search of a living. Sharpening class difference between a mobile global elite and a still largely stationary population sinking ever deeper into abject poverty, hopelessness, and oblivion serves as a call to defend and restore places. So does a looming crisis of agriculture as millions suffer from chronic food shortages, due at least in part (as in the People’s Republic of China, for example) to the destruction of the countryside to finance local development and projects of urbanization in megacities. The consciousness is global, cutting across national and class lines, spearheaded in many instances by the concerns and plight of women.¹⁾ It is deepened by pervasive anxiety about the consequences of globalization for the ecological sustenance of the globe.

In the hegemonic ideologies of development and progress, shared by now across national boundaries and along all points of the political spectrum, places are usually thought of in the past tense, as survivals from the past awaiting incorporation in a globalizing political economy if they are to partake of the benefits of development, or even to survive. The promise is realized in some places, and more for some among the population than for others. As the riches acquired by some are accompanied by abjection for countless others, places

1) For an informative and thoughtful discussion, see “Ecofeminism, Environmentalism and Women’s Movement in India: An Analysis,” in www.womenenvironment.org/detail.php?pageld=280.

located on global networks of capital have done much better than those out of the loop, if at the cost of a sense of “placelessness” that comes with the enforced motions of globalization.

The destruction, threatened destruction or intense anxiety about place(an aspect of what has been described as “the risk society”²⁾) has stimulated an intense concern with places. The concern is evident in the proliferation of academic literature on the subject, in popular culture in such notable films of the last few decades as “Local Hero,” “The Englishman Who Went Up the Hill and Came Down the Mountain,” “Airport,” and “Up in the Air”(this last one is more about placelessness than about place), and above all in the social movements that have become an increasingly powerful force in national and global politics. Recent upheavals in North Africa and Southwest Asia demonstrate the power of these movements.

The result of this activity has been the diffusion globally not only of the necessity of defending places, but of an investment in places that in its orientation to the future is not just sentimental but rationally conceived, albeit with a different rationality than that which drives the hegemonic ideology. In this perspective, the health of places socially and ecologically serves as a measure of the health and sustainability of the prevailing economic system. Places also appear in much of contemporary cultural production, to borrow a term from David Harvey, as “spaces of hope” — political projects that may be crucial to human welfare and survival.³⁾ These political projects derive additional impetus from loss of faith — typical of earlier efforts to contain the uncertainties created by capitalism, including socialist alternatives to it — in the willingness or the ability of the state to serve as the guarantor of a decent society

2) Ulrich Beck, *Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity*, trans. Mark Ritter (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2005, first published in German, 1986).

3) David Harvey, *Spaces of Hope* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).

and national welfare. Nation-states are caught up in the maelstrom of globalization as its managers — still in the name of the nation but increasingly alienated from the everyday needs of its constituencies.

Place orientation comes in many guises, with different political visions. Despite social and cultural homogenization under the double forces of the market and the nation-state, places are marked by ecological and social differences that call for a different kind of thinking than the universalist instrumentalist rationality that Max Weber identified as the driving force of the modern state under capitalism, which also informs contemporary education and scholarship both in their goals and their methodologies.⁴⁾ Places are inhabited by different constituencies, with conflicting interests and visions. They may be inward-looking and isolationist or open to the outside, they may be egalitarian or hierarchical, they may be characterized by differences in location in the broader political economy, natural endowment, economic activity, ethnic and racial composition, gender relations, cultural orientations, and so on and so forth.

These differences matter in the ways places are envisioned as locations for, and building blocks of, a sustainable economy, society, and politics. My interest here is in the way places are envisioned in relationship to two other paradigmatic phenomena of our times, indigenism and social movements. For reasons I will elaborate below, more than any other political and cultural orientation currently available, indigenism offers an indispensable critical perspective on the hegemonic assumptions that inform globalization that may be sustained only by an ideological faith in its promises that glosses over its unsustainable consequences.

4) The classic critique of education is to be found in the work of Paolo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1973). For a more recent discussions by a distinguished contemporary critic focusing on the contemporary United States, see Henry A. Giroux, *The Giroux Reader*, ed. Christopher G. Robbins (Boluder: Paradigm Publishers, 2008). For a critically acute and historically informed discussion of instrumental reason, see Darrow Schecter, *The Critique of Instrumental Reason from Weber to Habermas* (New York: Continuum Books, 2010).

Social movements, on the other hand, offer a means to linking places in larger wholes that are important not only for overcoming the parochialism that is the predicament of place-based politics but also to answer to the demands of sustenance within political economic spaces that of necessity transcend places.

Globalization: Come and Gone?

There are different ways to understand globalization. The simplest, and most trivial, is globalization as something humans have been doing since they learned to wander from their place(s) of origin. A more restricted sense is that of globalization as an inherent spatial tendency of the capitalist economy that has led to the ongoing integration of the globe over the last half millennium.⁵⁾ The most limited sense, the one in which it is deployed most often, although not in the sense I would like to phrase it, is globalization as a conjunctural phenomenon, episodes of relatively rapid surge in global integration that represent quantum leaps or stages in the unfolding of long-term historical tendencies. The second half of the nineteenth century would seem to be one such episode.⁶⁾ The last half century would seem to be another.

The usefulness of the conjunctural perspective is that it accounts for surges in globalizing activity but also for retreats from it within a long-term historical tendency, distinguishing one phase from the one preceding it in a long-term narrative. It also draws attention to the specific historical form it takes at different times. Nineteenth century globalization was driven by European expansion empowered by industrial capitalism and nationalism, characterized by

5) Roland Robertson, "Mapping the Global Condition," in Robertson, *Globalization: Social Theory and Global Culture* (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 1994), pp. 58-59

6) Paul Hirst and Grahame Thompson, *Globalization in Question: The International Economy and the Possibilities of Governance* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1996).

colonialism and reorganization of societies globally in the nation-form, which also defined its limits as the globe was re-fragmented along colonial, national and, ultimately, Cold War boundaries.⁷⁾ Contemporary globalization is postnational, postcolonial, and postsocialist. Euro/American capitalism played a crucial dynamic part in this episode as well, this time around driven by a revolution in information and transportation technologies. A major stimulus to contemporary globalization has been the proliferation of centers to capitalist modernity, most importantly in East Asia, and the availability of new spaces for capitalist expansion in postcolonial and formerly socialist societies.

What makes the present situation unprecedented is the seeming disappearance of an outside to capital. But is it possible that over the last decade we have witnessed the end to this most recent episode in the resplintering of the globe along faultlines that bear upon them traces of an earlier colonial modernity as well as of this most recent episode of globalization, this time around within the constitution of a global capitalism? Evidence of such fracturing is all around us, not only in endemic warfare involving former colonial territories but even more significantly in the struggles over hegemony within the capitalist world system. Whether or not the contemporary crisis of capitalism signals a shift in hegemony remains to be seen. What we can observe with greater confidence is that globalization has produced(or brought to the surface) new divisions around nations and civilization that find expression in ideological and cultural if not actual physical conflict, backlash against the unbridled motions of capital and people, especially the latter, a division between those who have benefited from globalization and those who have been marginalized by it, and new transnational

7) Jeffrey A. Frieden, *Global Capitalism: Its Fall and Rise in the Twentieth Century* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 2006); John Ralston Saul, *The Collapse of Globalism and the Reinvention of the World* (Toronto: Viking Canada, 2005); Arif Dirlik, *Global Modernity: Modernity in the Age of Global Capitalism* (Boulder: Paradigm Publishers, 2006).

class divisions with an unprecedented accumulation of wealth and power in the hands of a minority.⁸⁾ If it got under way as a new expression of Euro/American imperialism, it also has strengthened states such as the People's Republic of China which have been able to take advantage of economic globalization not to weaken but to strengthen the state. Rather than recede before the forces of globalization, national sovereignty or aspiration to it has acquired renewed vigor from the global spread of capitalism. The capitalist world-system itself has experienced fragmentation, producing claims to alternative capitalisms and alternative modernities. This is the situation — a situation of simultaneous integration and fragmentation — that I have described as Global Modernity.⁹⁾

The world of global modernity is multi-centered rather than center-less, as has been suggested by Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri in their influential treatise, *Empire*.¹⁰⁾ Strategies for containing capitalism associated with state centered socialism have not lost their appeal either, as is demonstrated by interest in the so-called Chinese model. But if such models may be appealing, it is no longer because of their promise of human liberation and welfare, but as examples of efficient development. It seems safe to say that revolutionary socialism is a thing of the past both because of memories (and actualities) of oppression, and due to the entanglement of socialist societies in the capitalist economy. Besides, it is not clear that socialist states as players in the capitalist economy have the freedom of action economically to shape the futures of their

8) Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1998); Leslie Sklair, *The Transnational Capitalist Class* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2001); William I. Robinson, *A Theory of Global Capitalism: Production, Class, and State in a Transnational World* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004); Chrystia Freeland, "The Rise of the New Global Elite," in *The Atlantic* (January/February 2011), pp. 14.

In <http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/print/2011/01/the-rise-of-the-new-global-elite/8343>.

9) Arif Dirlik, *Global Modernity: Modernity in the Age of Global Capitalism* (Boulder: Paradigm Publishers, 2006).

10) Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000).

societies, as had been assumed in the Leninist tradition. These states suffer from inequalities and oppressions that match those of capitalist states. They are also alienated from large portions of their constituencies.

The new times call for a new politics. The spaces for this new politics are to be found not outside of but in the contradictions of a globalized capitalism. The challenge presently is not to overthrow a globalized capitalism, or to replace the capitalist state with a socialist one, neither of which appears as an imminent possibility. The challenge rather is to build up a more just and sustainable society from the bottom up, to socialize the spaces offered by these contradictions. This is where the politics of place comes in. But if it is to have any hope of long-term success, place-based needs to discover the means to project itself into the spaces of capital and the state, to re-ground economic life, and secure the help of the state to that end.

Global/Local: Spatial/Place-based

Despite its apparent specificity, the concept of place suffers from considerable ambiguity in its confusion with a generic idea of the local. Especially important are issues of topographical groundedness and the boundaries of places. The ambiguity may be illustrated concretely through Doreen Massey's influential theorization of a socialized conception of place. As she has put it in a discussion of place with reference to the related idea of space.

If the spatial is thought of in the context of space-time and as formed out of social interrelations at all scales, then one view of a place is as a particular appreciation of those relations, a particular moment in those networks of social relations and understandings. But the particular mix of social relations which are thus part of what defines the uniqueness of any place is by no means all included within that place itself.

Importantly, it includes relations which stretch beyond-the global as part of what constitutes the local, the outside as part of the inside. Such a view of place challenges any possibility of claims to internal histories or to timeless identities. The identities of places are always unfixed, contested and multiple. Places viewed in this way are open and porous.¹¹⁾

That place-consciousness does not of necessity require spatial boundedness or the exclusion of the extra-local, temporal stasis, or social homogeneity are important reminders that these putative characteristics of place consciousness were more a fabrication of modernist prejudice than a description of the realities of premodern (and modern) local societies. On the other hand, this critique of the marginalization of places in a modernist radicalism does not quite abolish the problematic of place; places may not be “place-bound,” but the abolition of the distinction between place-based and spatial reintroduces an ambiguity at another level by denying the distinctiveness of the place-based: the effort to salvage place ends up by declaring that there is nothing special about place after all. Massey's conceptualization needs to be amended by a further critique of the spatialization of places which is overly zealous, I think, in disassociating place from fixed location.

This is where ecological and indigenous conceptions of place have some crucial insights to contribute by bringing nature into the conceptualization of place. The ecological conception insists that an important aspect of the concept of place is its groundedness in topography.¹²⁾ Most theoretical discussions of place of which I am aware take place within the context of urban geography and sociology, with the consequence that this aspect of place consciousness

11) Doreen Massey, *Space, Place, and Gender* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), p. 5.

12) For a critical discussion of efforts to reconcile Marxism to green thought, see Noel Castree, “The Nature of Produced Knowledge: Materiality and Knowledge Construction in Marxism”, *Antipode* 27 no. 1 (1995), pp. 12-48. For indigenous conceptions, see the following section.

disappears into the background. Ecologically conceived discussions of places, by contrast, are of necessity attentive to questions of the fixity of places and the limitations set on the production of place by its immediate environment.¹³⁾

The topographical grounding of place immediately points to a second question, the question of boundaries. If place is not enclosed within exclusive boundaries, can the concept of space therefore dispense with the problem of boundaries? Massey's reconceptualization of space and place in terms of social relations ("the spatial is social relations 'stretched out'"¹⁴⁾) is quite fruitful. Without some delimitation of how far social relations may be "stretched out," however, place may be meaningless, especially in these days of diasporas where even kinship relations, for example, may be stretched out over the globe, making place indistinguishable from the global. This may be the reason that, for all her effort at specifying place, Massey's discussion continues to use place-based, spatial and local interchangeably, where place is on occasion equated with the territory of the nation.¹⁵⁾ Here, too, attention to the groundedness of places in ecology and topography is important. This is not to return to some kind of geographic determinism or bounded notion of place, but to suggest that any critical notion of place must recognize some notion of boundary; porosity of boundaries is not the same as the abolition of boundaries. What is most important is the

13) Such discussions are voluminous, and represent a spectrum from the bizarre to the eminently sensible. For a sampling of reasoned defenses of ecologically conceived places, see Andrew Dobson ed., *The Green Reader: Essays Toward a Sustainable Society* (San Francisco: Mercury House, 1991).

14) Massey, *op. cit.*, p. 2.

15) *Ibid.*, p. 8, e.g. where national liberation movements are described as the classic case of place-based struggles, which also ignores the part nationalism has played in erasing places. For a recent critique, see David Harvey, *Cosmopolitanism and the Geographies of Freedom* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), Chapter 8: "Places, Regions, Territories." See also the essays in, Roxann Prazniak and Arif Dirlik eds., *Places and Politics in an Age of Globalization* (Boulder: Rowman and Littlefield, 2001).

reconceptualization of boundaries in terms of human activity rather than geographically given limits, the demands of closed communities, or the administrative fiat of states.

Groundedness, which is not the same thing as immutable fixity, and some measure of definition by flexible and porous boundaries, I suggest, are crucial to any conceptualization of place and place-based consciousness. Place as metaphor suggests groundedness from below, and a flexible and porous boundary around it, without closing out the extra-local, all the way to the global. What is important about the metaphor is that it calls for a definition of what is to be included in the place from within the place—some control over the conduct and organization of everyday life, in other words—rather than from above, from those placeless abstractions such as capital, the nation-state, and their discursive expressions in the realm of theory.

Place conceived as project provides a context in which we may reformulate the ways in which we think of spaces presently. Massey's reminder that what makes a place unique is a "particular mix of social relations" is well-taken but one-sided. If places are produced, as Henri Lefebvre tells us,¹⁶⁾ and are not merely preordained locations where things happen, the production of place includes as part of its very constitution the production of that "particular mix of social relations", which implies that social relations, and the categories in terms of which we conceive them, make sense most if we conceive them in terms of place-based manifestations, if not only in place-bound ways. That particular mix, in turn, produces the particular set of structures that give concrete meaning to social relations represented in categories of class, gender, race, etc.—and place itself. This has become more and more inescapable as (a)the

16) Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991), pp. 68-99.

production of places under Global Capitalism (as either creation or destruction) become a condition of life, and, (b) dissatisfaction with this situation has led to the questioning of the hegemonic implications of concepts divorced from places.

Most conspicuous in this regard are questions that have been raised concerning “development discourse”. Development discourse, assuming universality for its own particular definitions of poverty and wealth, stagnation and progress, and ultimately what constitutes a good life, has led to an invasion of the world by Euro-American capitalism (now joined by others), which ultimately has had destructive consequences for societies and natures.¹⁷⁾ An anthropologist of Nepal has argued that essential to the development discourse is an erasure of difference, in her case, of differences between living villages in Nepal to create a “generic village” that is more easily comprehended by developmentalist bureaucrats (foreign or Nepalese), and lend themselves more easily to development schemes directed from afar.¹⁸⁾ Those responsible for such erasure are not just far-away development bureaucrats, because it is “localized” through the complicity of the state, and native leaders who have internalized the culture of developmentalism; which is a problem that is not peculiar to Nepal but describes the complicity in erasing differences of all modernizing nation-states. Indeed, it is difficult to say in historical hindsight which, a voracious capitalism ever invading places or a nation-state inventing homogeneities, has been the bigger problem in the creation of such generic categories. The question may

17) Arturo Escobar, *Encountering Development: The Making and Unmaking of the Third World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995) and *Territories of Difference: place, movements, life, redes* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008).

18) Stacy Leigh Pigg, “Inventing Social Categories Through Place: Social Representations and Development in Nepal,” *Comparative Study of Society and History* 34, no. 3 (July 1992), pp. 491-513. For an unusual discussion by an economist, see Stephen A. Marglin, *The Dismal Science: How Thinking Like and Economist Undermines Community* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008).

ultimately be moot because the complicity of state and capital (or in the case of existing socialisms, of state and managerial bureaucrats) extends over the history of modernity. Closer attention to difference, which implies closer attention to place, reveals that while developmentalism has already destroyed much, it has not destroyed everything, and the hybrid forms that place-based native traditions have forced on a universalist developmentalism may yet provide alternative ways of thinking about life and change against a development discourse that recognizes no exterior.¹⁹⁾ Place in any case is essential to the critique of developmentalism, and imagining alternatives to it.²⁰⁾

The questioning of developmentalist universalism is one aspect of the questioning of universalist social categories. It inevitably raises questions about the universality of categories of social analysis, which are all products of the same modernity that produced developmentalism, and are implicated in it one way or another. In this case, however, there is greater complexity to both the sources of such questioning, and to its consequences, which has played a major part in the debates over the global and the local, the spatial and the place-based. Are classes conceivable without reference to places? Are genders, races and ethnicities? Is the obliviousness to places in the use of such categories responsible for the rendering of critical categories into instruments of hegemony? The sources of such questions are complex, because the questions do not arise unmediated from the conditions of capitalism or the state, but are mediated by differences that emerge simultaneously with the enunciation of the categories themselves: for instance, questions of gender and race in class, questions of race and class in gender, questions of gender and class in race. Place appears as one more such critical question.

19) Escobar, *Encountering Development*, pp. 217-222.

20) Bill McKibben, *Deep Economy: The Wealth of Communities and the Durable Future* (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 2007).

The consequences are also complex. Places that define themselves in terms of communities, or some kind of “place-bound” (I use this term intentionally) identity, also end up disguising and suppressing inequalities and oppressions that are internal to place. The ease with which “communities” blame internal dissensions on outside agitators has the obviousness of a cliché. Social categories such as class, gender, race are divisive against the self-image of the community. Could the inequalities that they articulate be faced, let alone resolved, without a sense of the categories as universals? On the other hand, viewed from supracommunity perspective, these categories are also integrative, providing bonds between places, that may be the only defense against supraplace forces (of capital and the state) playing communities against one another to maximize their own powers.

It may be because such categories have assumed hegemonic implications in their complicity with supra-place power that place has begun to intrude insistently into their constitution. But the structural conditions of Global Capitalism, and the gradual abandonment by nation-states of the responsibilities they had assumed briefly for remedying spatial inequalities in national territories, have done much to underline the placedness of categories of social analysis. Such abandonment has brought places face-to-face with capital without the mediation of the state, set places against one another in the competition for attracting capital and, in the process, revealed the fracturing of categories of social analysis along place differences. Hence the arguments heard frequently that classes and class relations are best understood in their place-based manifestations, that gender has a place aspect to it that is not addressed in its qualifications by class and race, ethnicity which has been globalized in contemporary diasporic motions needs to be understood also in terms of places, which is where different ethnicities confront one another, and race, which has always been a

meaningless category, carries different meanings in different locations. The questioning of hegemony that place makes possible is not an alternative to, but an additional moment-albeit a most fundamental one-in the questioning of the hegemony of homogenizing abstractions, this time directed at the very anti-hegemonic categories themselves.

Finally, the question of culture, and the organization and transmission of knowledge that is integral to any conceptualization of culture as a dynamic force. If we are to engage the question of culture in any anti-hegemonic, critical sense, can we dispense with places? I realize that the notion of culture has been used for long to imprison places, to render place-bound cultural identities into markers of backwardness, which then has provided the excuse for opening them up to "civilization"-global and national. But having gone through the latter process already, is it time once again to reaffirm culture as a place-based (not place-bound)phenomenon? Culture being a prime weapon in the struggles over hegemony, the question has a particular urgency in this, the age of Global Capitalism.

What is it that a place-based imagination has to offer, and what may be the conceptualization of places that contributes the most to this end? It seems to me that it is necessary, to begin with, to "place" globalism so as to counteract its mystification of its own location. The agenda of globalism, which seeks further to erase difference even while eulogizing the latter, gives away its continuities with earlier discourses of development. If globalism is more efficient as a developmentalist ideology, it is because it seeks to conceal, with some success, that this agenda is set still within the old locations of power, but now with the complicity of states, corporations, intellectuals and experts of the Global South, who are allowed increasingly to participate in the discourse and processes of development; partly as an unavoidable consequence of their incor-

poration into a global capitalism, and partly because their participation is deemed to be necessary to the efficient operation of transnationalism. The condition of their participation, nevertheless, is their internalization of the knowledge and norms of the system. It follows that the stress on place also entails the reconceptualization of those societies not only against First World domination, but also against the domination of places by nation-states, against transnationalized classes, genders, ethnicities (e.g. “diasporic identities”), etc.

The second aspect is that, under such conditions, places have come to face the operations of global power more directly, as nation-states become more complicit in globalism, and abandon gradually the task they had assumed earlier of mediating the global and the local. In contrast to, say, earlier ideologies of national liberation that rested in the nation-state the responsibility for the defense of places, places now must fend for themselves.²¹) This is not to say that the nation-state has become irrelevant, or that it should be conceded to the forces of globalism. But it is more urgent than ever to “place” the nation-state itself, demystify its claims, and organize against it, if only as a means to resuscitating the connection between place and nation—this time from below. It is also necessary, to this end, to reconsider relations between places, between places and trans-place or supra-place organizational forms, and, finally, across national boundaries, to imagine alternative possibilities in the reorganization of spaces.

21) Arif Dirlik, *After the Revolution: Waking to Global Capitalism* (Hanover: Wesleyan University Press, 1994); Michael H. Shuman, *Going Local: Creating Self-Reliant Communities in a Global Age* (New York: The Free Press, 1998), Introduction.

Indigenism as Paradigm

In current usage, indigenism, too, suffers from an ambiguity similar to that of place-based as it is used vaguely in a sense similar to local, as in the “indigenization” of the global, meaning the appropriation of the global for regional, national, or sub-national contexts. This is not the sense in which I deploy it here. By indigenism, I refer to the practices of indigenous people who, we might suggest, are paradigmatically place-based.

Indigenous people, the people of the “Fourth World,” have become quite visible in world politics since the 1970s. Anti-colonial struggles after World War II, but especially from the 1960s, also empowered indigenous people, and brought them together across national boundaries, culminating in 1975 in the founding of the World Council of Indigenous Peoples. The United Nations, and other international organizations such as the ILO (International Labor Organization), provided a novel political space for indigenous self-assertion. Indigenous lobbying led in 1982 to the creation of the Working Group on Indigenous Peoples, which over the last two decades has served as the advocacy group for the voicing of indigenous grievances, communication among indigenous peoples, and legislation intended to protect indigenous political and cultural rights. These efforts culminated in 2007 in the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.²²⁾ Indigenous concerns have been very important in the formulation of legislation on so-called Cultural Property Rights, to protect the integrity of native cultures against the commodifying forces of global capitalism and national economic exploitation (as in the exploitation of indigenous cultural practises and forms in tourism). While nation-states have had much reason to be unhappy about indigenous self-assertion, United Nations

22) Thomas D. Hall and James V. Fenelon, *Indigenous Peoples and Globalization: Resistance and Revitalization* (Boulder: Paradigm Publishers, 2009).

activity has spurred action at the national level for the protection of indigenous peoples and cultures. The estimated 300,000 indigenous people around the world have indeed become quite visible, and serve as the source of a new kind of social mobilization in the name of economic, political and cultural survival and justice. The issue of indigenous rights is ultimately an issue of human rights, with profound implications for everyone.

Indigenous views on economic development, political sovereignty, and culture transcend indigenous peoples themselves in their consequences. The very fact of indigenous self-assertion has called into question distinctions of civilized and uncivilized, progressive and backward, and developed versus underdeveloped that have informed modern ideas of progress and development. Indigenous people have added a whole new dimension to the understanding of colonialism by pointing to their colonization at the hands not only of the First but also of the Second and Third Worlds, themselves victimized in different ways by colonialism. The continued colonization of indigenous peoples raises questions about assertions concerning the end of colonialism. It also underlines the fundamental character of the nation-state as a colonizing force, enforcing cultural homogeneity and assimilation even where they do not exist. The indigenous idea of community directly challenges the claims of the nation as “community,” while the indigenous search for a political space that exists above the nation presupposes a higher legal authority than the nation-state. In either case, sovereignty is shifted from the nation-state to the local community, or the supra-national organizational and legal context of the nation-state.²³⁾

Most important may be the indigenous cultural challenge. Indigenous societies by definition display a great variety of cultural practises. But underlying such

23) For a discussion of these issues, see Franke Wilmer, *The Indigenous Voice in World Politics: Since Time Immemorial: Violence, Cooperation, Peace* (Newberry Park: Sage Publications, 1993), especially Chapter 2.

differences are certain common assumptions, by no means restricted to indigenous peoples, that reaffirm the intimate and organic connectedness of culture, social existence, and the natural environment. These assumptions inevitably call into question our ways of knowing, and demand a knowledge that serves the purposes not of capital or the state but of human survival and justice. Since “culture, knowing, and living are intricately interrelated,” there is no distinction in these convictions between knowledge and ethics. Such a knowledge, grounded in “the ecology of place,” needs also to be mindful of the interconnectedness of all phenomena.²⁴⁾

The coherence and consistency of indigenous views of society, nature and knowledge is easily exaggerated. Indigenous itself is a term that is open to a wide range of interpretation. While there may be some plausibility to claims to “native” belonging in the settler societies of the Americas, Australia, or Taiwan, indigeneity is quite controversial in the case of societies with longer histories. Andrew Gray writes that ‘indigenous’ is as much a concept of political action as it is of semantic reflection.” He elaborates:

The clinching concept in the definition of indigenous is “self-determination.” This open-ended umbrella term covers self-identification, political and resource control, and free cultural expression. From this we see that indigeness is a quality or aspect of the identity of peoples who have lived in an area prior to conquest or colonization and who are not empowered to live according to their socio-cultural, economic, and political

24) Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (London: ZED, 1999), esp., Chap. 10. Angayuqaq Oscar Kawagley and Ray Barnhardt, “Education Indigenous to Place: Western Science Meets Native Reality,” in Gregory A. Smith and Dilafruz R. Williams eds., *Ecological Education in Action. On Weaving Education, Culture, and the Environment* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999), pp. 117-140, pp. 126, 133, respectively for the quotations. For an important collection of documents on indigenous world views within the context of political and cultural struggles, see Roger Moody ed., *The Indigenous Voice: Visions and Realities*, 2nd revised edition (Utrecht: International Books, 1993).

life-styles. The indigenous movement is an assertion of this identity.²⁵⁾

Indigenous people have suffered centuries of colonization, as well as political and cultural transformation, that have created new kinds of divisions in societies so described. While it may speak the language of primordialism, moreover, indigenism is very much a product of the present both in its adjustments to new forms of knowledge, and in discursive conflicts over the meaning and strategy of indigenism among the indigenous peoples themselves. It is also open to manipulation at the hands of indigenous elites who utilize the ideology of indigenism to promote interests that are not necessarily shared by the communities they claim to represent.²⁶⁾

These problems serve as excuses for discrediting indigenism by states and ideologues of modernity, capitalist or socialist, to whom indigenous anti-developmentalism is one more sign of backwardness. Given their own ideological sources, such evaluations should not be taken at face value. Neither should indigenism be dismissed as one more consumerist fad because of New Age appropriations of its ideas and practises. Care must be taken to recognize the special problems of indigenous societies, and not to appropriate indigenous concerns for problems of contemporary society in general. But indigenism does

25) Andrew Gray, "The Indigenous Movement in Asia," in Barnes, Gray and Kingsbury eds., *Indigenous Peoples of Asia*, *op. cit.*, pp. 35-58, pp. 41, 40, respectively for the quotations.

26) For a discussion of exploitative relations within indigenous societies, with reference to the Maori, see Elizabeth Rata, "The Theory of Tribal Capitalism," paper presented at the Sociological Association of Aotearoa/New Zealand (28-30 November 1997). I am grateful to Dr. Rata for sharing this paper with me. For an advocacy of bringing together science and native knowledge, see Kawagley and Barnhardt, "Education Indigenous to Place," *op. cit.* The proper approach to such synthesis was the subject of a recent conference, "Turning Science to the Service of Native Communities," University of Alaska-Fairbanks (July 2003), pp. 13-15. See also Arif Dirlik, "The Past as Legacy and Project: Postcolonial Criticism in the Perspective of Indigenous Historicism," in Kenneth Lincoln ed., *Gathering Native Scholars: UCLA's Forty Years of American Indian Culture and Research* (Los Angeles: UCLA American Indian Studies Center, 2009), pp. 367-395.

speak to issues that are of general concern; which accounts at least in part for the empowerment of the indigenous voice in world politics in recent years. The welfare of indigenous societies, as of places, may well be a litmus test in determining the well-being of societies worldwide.

Indigenism provokes a great deal of opposition, if not disdain, because at least at the theoretical/philosophical level, it rejects the language of power that infuses both global relations, and our ways of knowing the world. While indigenous philosophies have been relegated to backwardness by modern assumptions about progress, perhaps even more adamantly under socialist than under capitalist states, what is at issue entails more than progressiveness or backwardness. Retrograde revivals in the dominant religions find advocates at all levels of society, while indigenous claims are as a rule greeted with impatient irritability. What is ultimately at issue in all instances is power; more precisely, the repudiation in political and cultural indigenism of existing norms and organization of politics and knowledge. Indigenism demands a new language of politics and knowledge, which is what makes it radical in implication even if indigenous peoples are not always able to live up to their own cultural and philosophical self-images. Indeed, while indigenism speaks in the language of the past, the language is informed more by vision than by empirical evidence that the vision had been realized anytime in the past. Indigenism, in other words, has a strong utopian strain.

Fundamental to any claim to indigenous identity is an assertion of an inalienable connection between community and land, and, by extension, between society and nature. While this is often expressed in a language of spirituality that is so dear to New Age devotees, what is important to it in my view is its refusal to draw any clear distinction between the spiritual and the material; so that it would be equally legitimate to describe indigenous spirituality as being

grounded materially. This is quite visible in indigenous claims, for example, which hold that separation from land would result not just in the physical but also in the cultural extinction of the community; an appeal that ironically seems to carry more weight legally than the actual physical extinction of communities. Refusal to draw a distinction between the material and the spiritual distinguishes indigenous claims from the spiritualities of organized religion, accustomed as the latter is to “realistic” distinctions between secular and spiritual power, that goes against the formal and legal demands of modern secularism. It is, on the other hand, quite resonant with mystical strains in all religions, and reminiscent in its assumptions—in the present context—of the philosophical principles of Daoism. An ecological social sensibility may be the best way to describe it in secular terms.

Given this sensibility, indigenism is critical of development projects that ignore immediate social needs as well as long-term natural consequences of development. Indeed, since indigenous peoples have consistently been victims of development, it is not surprising that they should question the developmentalism of the societies that have victimized them in the name of economic and political progress. But we may also recognize that having been victimized or bypassed by development projects is also an important element in fostering indigenous objections to development, when others deriving at least some benefit from development have been resigned to, if not actively forgetful, of the price it exacts in social and ecological alienation. It is here that the indigenous movement has served as the conscience of an ecological approach to nature and society that has been erased by the fetishism of development, globalized by the globalization of capitalism, but a globalization which a socialism under the sway of capitalism did much to promote against its own ideological compulsions.²⁷⁾

27) One of the important texts to come out of the radical ferment of the 1960s in the United States,

Finally, in the political realm, the indigenous claim of ties to the land challenges the relationship the nation-state presupposes between land and national territory. Land in the indigenous conception is not only intimately connected with the people who work it and draw their sustenance from it, but derives its meaning from that relationship, which is as much a spiritual as a material relationship. The claim is one that has created much legal headache for nation-states, but also has exposed the fundamentally colonialist character of the nation. It is, in fact, an assertion of place-based sovereignty not only against an off-ground globalization, but also against the abstractions of the nation-state. This does not necessarily call for the abolition of the nation-state, as became quite clear during the Zapatista Uprising in Chiapas. Rather, accepting the nation-state as one more level in a multi-leveled regulatory system, place consciousness points to the need to restore democracy to the functioning of states that have become ensnared ever more powerfully in the corporate organization and plunder of the earth's resources; in which, under the new regime of postmodern globality, there are no longer any clear distinctions between elites of the first, the second and the third worlds. For all its faults, the Fourth World remains as a reminder of possible alternatives to the existing state of things.²⁸⁾

The utopian ideals asserted in indigenism are important, on the one hand, to

overlooked even by radicals, was *Marxism and Native Americans*, ed. Ward Churchill (Boston: South End Press, 1982) that pointed to the commonalities between Marxism and capitalism when it came to questions of development. For a commentary on this aspect of Marxism, within the context of globalization, see Arif Dirlik, *After the Revolution: Waking to Global Capitalism* (Hanover and London: Wesleyan University Press, 1994). There is also an unmistakable resonance in these critiques between indigenism and anarchism.

- 28) For a discussion of issue of place in connection with politics and culture, see Roxann Prazniak and Arif Dirlik eds., *Places and Politics in an Age of Globalization* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2001). For the relevance of indigenous ideas of organization to contemporary politics, see John Brown Childs et. al., *Transcommunitary: From the Politics of Conversion to the Ethics of Respect* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2003).

the social and cultural survival of indigenous peoples, but also speak, on the other hand, to problems created by unbridled developmentalism, as expressed in slogans of globalization. Indigenizing global trends in national spaces is one answer to the homogenizing forces of globality, but it stops at the level of national welfare and cultural identity, without addressing root problems created by developmentalism, in which elites globally are complicit.

On the other hand, it is necessary to recognize that indigenism itself is a modern, if not a postmodern phenomenon. The integrity of the indigenous vision itself may be more imagined than real. Indigenous societies, in their interactions with the world “outside,” are subject to social divisions of class, gender, and racial/ethnic diversity, among other differences, that reveal claims to harmony to be questionable. These divisions need to be addressed if harmony is to be more than an ideological cover for new forms of power. Place-consciousness itself can serve as a cover for parochialism, and serve as an excuse for setting one place-based interest against another, unless groundedness in place is mindful of the holism of nature and society—understood not just as an ether of harmony, sort of to speak, but as a structured totality with contradictions built into its very structurations. We need to think in terms not just of places and holisms but also of translocal or transplace interactions that mediate the relationships between places and imperial centers, national or global.

Given the resonance between indigenism and matters of place, indigenism may serve as the source of much-needed utopias that may be drawn upon in the imagination of places, but only if it is open to transformations from utopian perspectives outside of itself. It may turn otherwise into one more element to be consumed in contemporary reconfigurations of global power, and a source of conservatism rather than a radical challenge to the *status quo*. One

way out of this predicament is to link indigenous struggles to social movements with broader goals, which is already on the agenda of both the social and the indigenous movements. Their cross-fertilization opens up new vistas for both movements.

Social Movements and Places

Social movements have been around for quite some time; at the very least, for the two centuries since the French Revolution.²⁹⁾ There is nevertheless a sense of novelty in contemporary commentary on social movements concerning their function, organization, purpose and effectiveness. The newfound significance of social movements, and the attraction they exert, has much to do with the decline of confidence globally in governments and political parties, including political parties on the left, or what remains of them. Reasons for political alienation may differ from one society to another, especially in different parts of the “Three Worlds” of an earlier time, but one thing that may be common to most contemporary states is the pressure to “globalize,” which in its neo-liberal guise also has meant the “de-socialization” of the state, and its alienation from its constituencies--to the point where it on occasion appears as an alien power established against the interests of the population it is supposed to govern. As one leader of the Sem Terra Movement in Brazil observed of the Cardoso Presidency, the “government that has subordinated itself completely to

29) Charles Tilly has suggested that social movements are products of modernity, with characteristics since the 19th century that distinguish them from earlier oppositional movements, such as the many agrarian uprisings that brought down Chinese dynasties. See Charles Tilly, “From Interactions to Outcomes in Social Movements,” in Marco Giugni, Doug McAdam and Charles Tilly eds., *How Social Movements Matter* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), pp. 253-270. One could also, alternatively, recognize that social movements-as movements emanating from society-long have existed, but have assumed different characteristics and functions at different times and places. Still, it is worth pondering if the term would be appropriate in times and places where there was no conception of the “social” as it emerged in the 19th century.

the interests of international capital, and has imposed that surrender on Brazilian agriculture.”³⁰) Brazil is by no means exceptional in this regard. The response on the part of large populations globally has been a pervasive and deepening suspicion of the state apparatus (including government and political parties), and its commitment to or ability for performing the social functions upon which rests its reason for existence. Social movements then become not just instruments of a new kind of politics, but a necessity of survival.

The crisis of governments is also the crisis of political parties. The seeming victory of neo-liberalism has led among political parties of widely varying backgrounds and philosophies to a scramble for corporate sponsorship that has weakened drastically earlier bonds to the population. This turn is most conspicuous in the parties of formerly socialist states, and most dramatically in those states such as the People’s Republic of China. The Communist Party of China continues to profess socialist commitment, but is increasingly distant from the population which responds by daily riots against state authority. But the trend is visible elsewhere. The Democratic Party in the United States and the Labour Party in Great Britain (not to speak of their conservative opponents) are prominent examples in formally democratic states of the ways in which formerly left parties have sought to accommodate neo-liberalism, sometimes even leading the path in the retreat from the social responsibilities of the state. States of the Global South, needless to say, have served as the instruments in the experimentation with neo-liberalism, more often than not with little to say about the policies of which they have been the objects. As in the case of the Cardoso regime in Brazil or the VP in India, parties of the elite have played a major part in this turn to neo-liberalism. It may be important in this connection to

30) Joao Pedro Stedile, “Brazil’s Landless Battalions”[interview], in Tom Mertes ed., *A Movement of Movements: Is Another World Really Possible?* (London: Verso, 2004), pp. 17-48.

take note of the recently published study of neo-liberalism by David Harvey, who has argued that neo-liberalism itself was engineered by elites globally (extending from the United States and Great Britain to Chile under Allende and the People's Republic of China under Deng Xiaoping) to recover the economic and political power they had lost to the populations at large during a half-century of socialism and the welfare state.³¹⁾

Social movements have become, under the circumstances, important vehicles not only of the expression of political interests or political opposition, but of political participation. Populations that have become increasingly marginalized in formal political processes, from the supposedly democratic United States to the supposedly socialist People's Republic of China, have found in social movements the only vehicles for the defense or achievement of popular rights, including the right to survival. The recent popular upheavals in North Africa and Southwestern Asia may be the most dramatic instances yet of politically motivated social movements that consciously have held political parties at an arm's length.³²⁾ The proliferation of social movements may provide the most eloquent testimonial to the shift of radical political activity to reorient itself once again from the political (state and political parties) to the social (the realm of the everyday).

Contemporary social movements do not just fill a political vacuum. They also represent an appealing (and appropriate) response to changes globally in the configuration and dynamics of political and economic power; in other words,

31) David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

32) Preston Manning, "The Rise of the Grassroots Movements," *Globe and Mail* (Thursday, 24 February 2011). www.theglobeandmail.com/rise-of-the-grassroots-movements/article1918061/-Canada. The classic forerunner of these movements is Solidarity in Poland in the 1980s. An important theoretical treatment from the perspective of globality is Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Multitude: War and Democracy in an Age of Empire* (New York: The Penguin Press, 2004). A recent compilation is to be found in Y. Dogan Cetinkaya ed., *Toplumsal Hareketler: Tarih, Teori ve Deneyim (Social Movements: History, Theory and Practice)* (Istanbul: Iletisim, 2008).

they express a political logic as well in their self-conscious openness to ideological and organizational experimentation. Both in their organization, and in the ways in which they lend themselves to contingent political alliances, contemporary social movements are marked by a self-conscious flexibility ideologically and organizationally that may be quite appropriate to a time of political flexibility. What has been termed globalization is characterized by ongoing structuration and de-structuration of global economic, political and cultural formations. Oxymoronic as it is to conjoin structure to fluidity, the contemporary world is a world of structural fluidity. The combination is necessary to comprehend a world that is reconfigured daily by contradictory forces of flexible production, political experimentation, and ongoing cultural renovation. Social movements offer a flexibility of their own that may make them particularly suitable to addressing the social and political exigencies of such times.

But the flexibility of social movements is a source of strength in another, and equally important sense: the ability to bring together in loose alliances different movements representing different constituencies. On the various occasions that social movements have achieved more than ordinary visibility—such as with the anti-APEC or anti-WTO protests, the movement appeared above all as a “movement of movements,” that brought together around one contingent cause movements as varied as labor, gender, peasant, indigenous, and anarchist movements, to name only some of them. Referring to the origin of contemporary social movements, Naomi Klein writes that,

It is more accurate to picture a movement of many movements-coalitions of coalitions. Thousands of groups today are all working against forces whose common thread is what might broadly be described as the privatization of every aspect of life, and the transformation of every activity and value into a commodity...At the same time, there are

oppositional threads, taking form in many different campaigns and movements. The spirit they share is a radical reclaiming of the commons.³³⁾

Rather than force all these varied movements into a single movement with a single cause, “the movement of movements” has provided spaces where diverse causes and interests could be articulated to one another, where unity around contingent causes took priority over long-term commitments, and where ideological unity and conformity was eschewed in the name of diversity.

Similarly with the crossing of social and national boundaries in these movements. Issues of class, for example, are approached in these movements with a good bit of openness, in contrast to earlier policing of class (or other boundaries). Equally striking is the transnational character of many of these social movements, even those that claim groundedness in places. It is not that social or national alliances are entirely novel, or that contemporary efforts to cross social or national boundaries are without problems. What is important in the long run is the assumption that such alliances, however contingent, are not merely matters of passing political convenience but expressions of a future society envisaged along similar organizational and ideological lines. Unlike earlier, when the world might have been divided into a number of worlds with different problems, there is an increasing sense, in the midst of the recognition of difference, of common problems faced by humankind, not just on such obvious matters as the environment, but also in the reconfiguring of the globe socially by the forces of global capitalism. As Stedile observes,

As the realities of neoliberal internationalization have been imposed on us, we’ve begun to hear stories from farmers in the Philippines, Malaysia, South Africa, Mexico, France,

33) Naomi Klein, “Reclaiming the Commons,” in Tom Mertes ed., *A Movement of Movements*, pp. 219-229.

all facing the same problems-and the same exploiters. The Indians are up against Monsanto, just as we are in Brazil, and Mexico, and France. It is the same handful of companies-seven groups, in total, worldwide-that monopolize agricultural trade, and control research and biotechnology. The new phase of capitalism has itself created the conditions for farmers to unite against the neoliberal model.³⁴⁾

Still, there is no room in these visions either of the future or of the desirable movement for organizational centralization or ideological homogeneity-or for political strategies of state conquest accompanied by social transformation from above. This may also be the reason for the revival anarchism has enjoyed in recent years against a Marxism that has been tainted for its association with the failed experiments with democratic centralism or a narrow class approach to social organization.

It may be for the same reason that occasions such as the anti-WTO protests, or, in an opposite vein, meetings of the World Social Forum, are crucial to the sustenance of the new social movements. Social movements are everywhere, and have been everywhere for the last few decades. Except in the case of established organizations (such as labor unions), the activities of most of these social movements are local, directed at the resolution of local problems or problems restricted to their immediate constituencies. Events such as the above bring local movements together over national or global issues. As they are made possible by these local movements which provide their substance, they in turn breathe energy into the latter in providing them with a global context of ideological, moral and organizational solidarity; which underlines the importance of regularizing such occasions.

Contemporary social movements owe much in their inspiration visions that emerged in the 1960s, and the activists of the period who carried those visions

34) Stedile, *op. cit.*, pp. 42-43.

to grassroots activity and organization. But they also represent a negation of some of the assumptions of an earlier radicalism. In an interview conducted in 2001, Subcomandante Marcos of the Zapatistas stated that,

We were formed in an army, the EZLN [Zapatista Army of National Liberation]... If the EZLN perpetuates itself as an armed military structure, it is headed for failure. Failure as an alternative set of ideas, as an alternative attitude to the world.... What would be a success to the politico-military organizations of the sixties or seventies which emerged with the national liberation movements would be a fiasco for us. We have seen that such victories proved in the end to be failures, or defeats, hidden behind the mask of success. That what always remained unresolved was the role of the people, of civil society, in what became ultimately a dispute between two hegemonies.³⁵⁾

This statement is testimonial to the contradictory relationship between contemporary social movements, and the movements of the 1960s and 1970s. Zapatistas like Marcos are themselves paradigmatic of this relationship as products of the 1960s that nevertheless have deemed it necessary to part ways with its politics.³⁶⁾ Marcos' statement reflects this contradiction in its simultaneous repudiation of the "politico-military" assumptions of 1960s national liberation movements, and its reaffirmation of the importance of the people in politics, which was just as much a hallmark of 1960s radicalism, inspired in many cases (certainly for Maoists) by the very same Third World National Liberation movements.

Intellectual Zapatistas such as Marcos are also exemplary of 1960s radicals who, faced with the setbacks to radical activity and vision of the kind associated

35) Subcomandante Marcos, "The Hourglass of the Zapatistas," in Tom Mertes ed., *A Movement of Movements*, pp. 3-15. Interview conducted by Gabriel García Márquez and Roberto Pombo.

36) It has been widely suggested that Subcomandante Marcos, formerly, Rafael Guillen, was in the 1960s a member of Maoist groups in the University of Mexico.

with political parties, turned to grass-roots organizing as a more democratic (and fundamental) route to the achievement of the goals of democracy, social justice and environmental welfare-as the Zapatistas in Mexico turned to organizing indigenous peoples in Chiapas. This has also led to greater place-consciousness among a new generation of radicals against an earlier radical suspicion of places as locations of backwardness and parochialism. Intellectually speaking, the new turn in radical politics would find philosophical inspiration in Antonio Gramsci, among others, for a more open-ended socially grounded politics of “articulation” characteristic of social movements against ideologically and socially bounded party politics. As Marcos’ statement suggests, a basic goal has been to avoid falling into one type of hegemony while trying to escape from another. How to establish a non-hegemonic politics has been a central problem of radical politics over the last three decades. In the process, “language” and words have assumed immense importance, as the Zapatistas were among the first to realize, replacing the fascination of some in an earlier era with “the barrels of guns.”

What may be most important about contemporary social movements, against the factionalism that plagued radical activity in the 1960s and 1970s, is their ideological if not always practical inclusiveness. While this makes for an incoherence that is a challenge to the long-term sustenance of contemporary movements, it also allows for experimentation with new social forms or, at the least, for social and cultural tolerance. Part of this inclusiveness involves openness to all organizations of a progressive bent, regardless of their specific agenda, so long as they come together around a common cause, such as the anti-WTO protests in Seattle. Aside from direct participants in the process, close to 1500 organizations from around the globe lent their blessings and organizational legitimacy to the protests. The majority of the organizations for

which information is available were established in the 1970s and 1980s. The oldest among them, Pro Natura, Friends of the Earth, Switzerland, was established in 1909, followed closely by a similar organization in Norway, established in 1914. The contemporary “movement of movements” is global in its spatial compass. It also consists of a multiplicity of temporalities. The multiplicity testifies to the openness of the movement to a broad range of concerns, as well as its ability in its decentralized structure to contain social, cultural and political diversity.³⁷⁾

Involvement in issues of globalization has brought social movements to public attention, and to some extent has shaped the contemporary image of social movements as themselves vehicles of globalization; so-called globalization from below. This is to some extent quite justifiable. While there is nothing new about transnational or international organization of social movements, in sheer quantity, intensity of interactions, and the direct involvement of social movements (in contrast to organizational mediation), present-day social movements exhibit a global orientation in activity and ideological disposition that may be unprecedented. Even the most local issues, prominent among them issues of indigenism, somehow manage to find their way to a global scene, demanding global resolutions. As Naomi Klein observes, “organizers around the world are beginning to see their local and national struggles-for better funding public schools, against union-busting and casualization, for family farms, and against the widening gap between the rich and the poor-through a global lens.”³⁸⁾

On the other hand, it is important not to be seduced with the glamour of

37) A letter of criticism of WTO was circulated by Public Citizen’s *Global Trade Watch* on the eve of the Seattle meetings, and was signed by 1400 organizations. The letter and the list are available on the web-site of the “WTO History Project” of the Harry Bridges Center for Labor Studies of the University of Washington.

38) Klein, *op. cit.*, p. 222.

globality and overlook another re-orientation in social movements over the last few decades; a re-orientation toward the local and the place-based. Ecological concerns, ongoing disorganization of everyday life in numerous communities around the world by an unprecedentedly mobile capital that draws attention to places and everyday life, uneven development, and the withdrawal of state welfare activity which forces communities to fend for themselves are among the material reasons for the renewed concern for places around the world. Ideologically speaking, the disillusionment with the consequences of Marxism-inspired socialism or with the failure of the liberal promises of an earlier age, has expanded the ideological and cultural space for the reception of place-oriented thinking, as exemplified by Gandhian philosophy, indigenism, or Anarchism, as well as right-wing and religious alternatives of various kinds—from right-wing fundamentalisms to the attention to places and everyday life in liberation theology.

Place-based politics, because it seeks groundedness against the fluidity of global processes, is easily confounded with a return to nationalism, especially where it seeks the protection of the state from below, such as in the calls for “food sovereignty,” to cite one example, which almost inevitably takes the nation as its unit.³⁹⁾ And place-based politics in many cases seeks to restore the bonds between the nation-state and its citizens that are being eroded as the state seems to drift almost irresistably into the orbit of global corporate capitalism. As a consequence, the significance of place-based politics is blurred as it disappears into debates over the national versus the global.

It would be wrong, however, to view place-based movements as traps for nationalism. The re-orientation to place breeds a sharper recognition of difference between places, bringing out differences that challenge nationalist assumptions

39) Stedile, *op. cit.*, p. 43.

of economic evenness and cultural homogeneity, and political equality. Recognition of such internal differences also blurs boundaries between the inside and the outside, and creates a new kind of boundary – a village in Yunnan, the People’s Republic of China, is likely to be closer in economic activity and culture to a village across the border in Vietnam, than to the capital in Kunming, not to speak of Beijing beyond the horizon. Where social movements are concerned, this would point to the translocal, rather than the transnational, as the locus of activity. Finally, attention to place is by no means inconsistent with national, regional or global activity. A foremost example of this is the Via Campesina, the global organization of farmers, which is also the source of the calls for “food sovereignty.”⁴⁰⁾

As I noted above, one of the most fundamental contributions of social movements to radical political activism has been the ideological and organizational flexibility which they both represent and generate. Hence the crucial challenge facing them is to be able to act in concert despite the recognition that shared interests are nevertheless inflected and overdetermined by difference, by seemingly endless difference.⁴¹⁾ One such difference is in the spatial level of activity.

To recall what Klein has said, cited above, a movement for public schooling at some locality implies a different level of organization than the struggle between the rich and the poor, or labor organizing, or gender or ethnic issues, to name just some. We may note here that the forces that are structuring

40) Tom Mertes, “Grass-roots Globalism: A Response to Michael Hardt,” in Tom Mertes, *A Movement of Movements*, pp. 237-247.

41) For an example, see Gail Omvedt, *Reinventing Revolution: New Social Movements and the Socialist Tradition in India* (Armonk: ME Sharpe, 1993), especially Chap. 9, “Women, Peasants, Tribals, Environment.” While Omvedt’s study is based on a period when social movements were just beginning to enter into global consciousness (along with globalization itself), the movements in India she describes have had remarkable longevity.

contemporary societies globally, the forces of global capital, operate at a multiplicity of level-from global organizations to regional and national alliances to local marketing niches. This complexity is suggestive for the agenda that faces radical efforts to transform life for the better. It also points to the realities of contemporary social movements which, whether or not they have anything to do with one another, pursue issues at one or more levels of activity. Urging the merger of the two forces of the local and the global in “one world with many worlds in it,” Klein writes,

What is now the anti-globalization movement must turn into thousands of local movements, fighting the way neoliberal politics are playing out on the ground: homelessness, wage stagnation, rent escalation, police violence, prison explosion, criminalization of migrant workers, and on and on. There are also struggles about all kinds of prosaic issues: the right to decide where the local garbage goes, to have good public schools, to be supplied with clean water. At the same time, the local movements fighting privatization and deregulation on the ground need to link their campaigns into one large global movement, which can show where their particular issues fit into an international economic agenda being enforced around the world.⁴²⁾

The spatialities of radical politics have proliferated beyond the local and the global, and the many other spaces in between and around them. This is quite evident in the proliferation of social movements with many causes. If the local (which covers much beyond the place-based) finds a voice in the global (which itself derives its meaning from its contrast with the local), the global is realized concretely in the global. This is what contemporary politics has learned from the past, and what contemporary social movements seek to embody.

42) Klein, *op. cit.*, p. 228. Klein attributes “one world with many worlds in it” to the Zapatistas.

Concluding Observations

Places are subject to significant ecological, social, political and cultural variation. Urban and rural places are radically different from one another, They in turn present a wide range of variety. Equally important is the variation in attitudes toward places that range from extreme right-wing isolationism to those that stress their “glocality.” For the same reasons, theorizing spaces runs up against the limitations of difference. Viewing places through the lens of indigenism brings into relief topographical groundedness without which the concept of place may be meaningless. On the other hand, viewing places through the lens of contemporary social movements underlines their connectedness in difference. The one view is as indispensable as the other in the formulation of a progressive politics of place that offers a global alternative to the homogenizing abstractions of neoliberal globalism that subjects places to the offground workings of a developmentalist ideology, and reaffirms the priority of a just, democratic, and ecologically sustainable human existence. Equally important, however, is the necessity of overcoming the contradictions thrown up by the conflicting demands of place-based and transnational or translocal politics, different orientations to what may be possible within the context of a global capitalist economy, and different relations to the political and cultural context of the nation-state.

The national context in its immediacy calls for comment here. I have suggested above that globalization has introduced ambiguities into the relationship between state and nation that are responsible to some extent for the renewed attention to places. Nevertheless, it goes without saying that the national economic, political and administrative context is integral to the imagination of places, the possibilities of place-based politics, and the configuration of relations between places. Nationalist ideology frames the conceptualization of the

relationship of places to the national whole. State policies may encourage or restrict place-oriented activity. The political organizational context has a direct bearing both on the politics of place and the possibilities of relationships between places.

If place-based politics is to have any measure of political significance, however, the national context is best conceived not as a determinant of places but as a condition that needs to be addressed in the realization of goals of place. The point about place-based politics is to render the state more responsive to the plight as well as the promise of places, which requires state recognition of the importance of place to the well-being of the nation as a whole. This is also what endows the politics of place with a politically transformative potential. The potential may vary from one context to another but it needs to be recognized as a general attribute that endows places with an autonomous significance of their own, and promises a different kind of politics than that which is centered around the state.

The same reasons that have led to an alienation from the state and political parties have also led to an alienation from Marxism because of its association with socialist states, or “actually existing socialism,” and their failed egalitarianism and developmentalism. The retreat of conventional Marxism has opened up spaces for receptivity to other radical alternatives to capitalism ranging from anarchism to indigenism to Ghandian legacies. These alternatives, as well as a Marxism that returns to its fundamentally social conception of politics, are all of them place-oriented, and all of them open, at least theoretically, to the organizational and ideological flexibility suggested by a “movement of movements” — organized along the lines of what Hardt and Negri have described as “distributed network structure” (although “relations” may serve as a better substitute for “structure” in order to avoid the rigidity the latter implies term implies).⁴³ The

practice is itself riddled no doubt with disagreement and factionalism, but it seems safe to observe at the least that experiences with party politics in liberal democracies and democratic centralization in socialist states (and Communist politics) that have made for a wariness of political centralization and ideological homogeneity, that invites closer attention to these other alternatives, especially anarchism.⁴⁴⁾

While the new attention to anarchism, and other alternatives, is quite welcome, one of the challenges facing contemporary social movements is how to reconcile these alternatives with one another, as well as with Marxism. A certain brand of Marxism driven by a utopian scientism must no doubt bear responsibility for much of what went wrong in existing socialist societies — of which the People’s Republic of China in its very success is exemplary. It seems, however, that no movement struggling against forces emanating from the globalization of capital can dispense with Marxism and its theoretical offerings. Global modernity is incomprehensible without reference to the political economy of capitalism. Same is true for the ongoing conflict between the forces of globalization and the many forces arraigned against it—from old-fashioned nationalism to religious fundamentalism to social forces speaking for social justice and democracy. Not least of the characteristics of global modernity is the contradiction between

43) Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire* (New York: The Penguin Press, 2004), p. 88.

44) Todd May, *The Political Philosophy of Poststructuralist Anarchism* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994), and Randall Amster, Abraham DeLeon, Luis A. Fernandez, Anthony J. Nocella, II, and Deric Shannon eds., *Contemporary Anarchist Studies: An Introductory Anthology of Anarchy in the Academy* (New York: Routledge, 2009). For a discussion of the overlap between anarchism, indigenism, and feminism in place-orientation and non-hierarchical social and inter-place relations, and its implications for de-colonialized international relations, see, Jacqueline Laski, “Post-Imperial Futures in International *Relations*,” Paper read at the International Studies Association venture research grant workshop, “Post-Imperial Futures: Anarchism, Indigenism and Feminism in Critical International Relations Theory and Praxis” on March 25, 2008 in San Francisco, California. Cited with the author’s permission.

national belonging and global class interests, which finds expression in many societies globally in clashes over questions of cultural homogenization or heterogenization. Insights provided by Marxist theory are crucial in the analysis of this contemporary configuration of the globe, even if old Marxist solutions no longer provide a convincing answer to how it might be overcome in the creation of a more just and democratic world. That includes the fundamental question of the capitalist economy: whether it is to be opposed without qualification, or mobilized through “community corporations” in service of “an economics of place.”⁴⁵⁾ The same with the problem of the state which needs now to be perceived as an extension of the local and place-based rather than the agent of top down development. Marxism, even the Marxism of Marx, has much to benefit from the insights of these other alternatives, including indigenism.⁴⁶⁾

Social movements have acquired the importance that they have in contemporary radical politics at least partly out of frustration on the part of many with Party dogmatism and ideological fundamentalism. It would be a shame, and a blow

45) Shuman, *Going Local*, pp. 27-28. For another discussion of this issue, see Daniel Kemmis, *Community and the Politics of Place* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1990).

46) Efforts to reconcile Marxism and indigenism, of particular relevance in Latin America, go back to the Peruvian Marxist Jose Carlos Mariategui. See Mariategui, *Seven Essays in Peruvian Reality*, trans. Marjory Urquidi (Austin: University of Texas Press). Marxism has also been an important element in Liberation Theology in Latin America, as well as in much intellectual work, in connection with problems of indigenous peoples who are also important in national identities. For a more recent example by a government official, the Vice-President of Bolivia, see Alvaro Garcia Linera, “Indianismo and Marxism: The Mismatch of two Revolutionary Rationales,” reprinted in *Links: An International Journal of Socialist Renewal*, in <http://links.org.au/node/484/1313>. See also the interview with Linares, “Marxism and Indigenism in Bolivia: A Dialectic of Dialogue and Conflict,” ZNET (April 25, 2005), in www.zcommunications.org/marxism-and-indigenism-in-Bolivia-a-dialectic-of-dialogue-and-conflict-byalvaro-garc-alinera. The discussion also offers an instructive instance of the creation of a social movement out of place concerns. The interest in indigenism is characteristic of “green” and feminist socialisms in general.

to efforts to confront problems created by neoliberal globalization, if they were to replicate these same mistakes. As they are presently constituted, parties and the state present serious obstacles to serious transformative politics, but to reject them on principle also means “rejecting a potential weapon in a radically unequal contest... [and] would severely limit the formulation of any alternatives to neoliberalism, confining such alternatives to a local or sectoral context.”⁴⁷⁾

Conflicts created by these complexities, including ideological conflicts, can only undermine their political potential which would be regrettable, as they have a crucial part to play in the access of many around the world to social justice and actual physical survival. In his book, *Transcommunalism*, inspired by Amerindian political practices, social worker and sociologist John Brown Childs suggests that we might make an effort to substitute an “ethics of respect” for the “ethics of conversion” that in the past has guided radical activity with its single-minded claim to ultimate truth.⁴⁸⁾ Respect implies also that where disagreement makes joint activity impossible, it should still be possible to exercise solidarity, as when the Brazilian activist Stedile acknowledges with respect to the Zapatistas that, “Our relations with the Zapatistas are simply those of solidarity. Their struggle is a just one, but its social base and its

47) Emir Sader, “Beyond Civil Society: The Left After Porto Alegre,” in Tom Mertes, *A Movement of Movements*, pp. 248-261. Sader’s remarks are directed most importantly to NGO’s, many of which would rather cooperate with transnational corporations than with parties and the state. But the political fundamentalism could be applied to any of the orientations under discussion here. The alternative to fundamentalism is not opportunism, thought that might well be the case on occasion, but openness to possibilities, including novel ones. We might note in this context that Latin America, which since the Social Forum has been a hotbed of social movements, also has witnessed the revival of left politics. That Latin America was the original object of the so-called Washington Consensus may offer one explanation for the attention there to the ills of neoliberal globalization. Another explanation may be the collaboration between social movements and progressive states, the one very much dependent on the other. See, Juan Forero, “In Latin America, a Leftist Vision is Taking Hold,” *The New York Times* (Friday, December 9, 2005).

48) Childs, *op. cit.*

method are different from ours.”⁴⁹⁾

Such an approach to difference requires an attitude change, or even an epistemological and cultural revolution in which education has an important role to play. That means education itself needs to undergo transformation, on the one hand to be rescued from its intensifying subjection to corporate needs and, on the other hand, to overcome received ways of state-centered thinking about development, social welfare and progress.⁵⁰⁾ The transformation is necessary not for reasons of identity, but for the long-term survival of social movements that have assumed a major share of the burden in overcoming problems presented to the vast majority of human beings by the forces of global capital, and the contradictions it generates.

Against the realities of corporate and state power, arguments for the empowerment of places may seem hopelessly utopian if not backward-looking. It seems less so if we recognize that the contemporary consciousness of place owes much to the very realities of global capitalism. What is crucial is to rescue the idea of place from the disdain it has suffered in state-centered ways of thinking about politics, and render it into a cornerstone in the re-imagination of politics—and the state itself. The kind of politics at issue here is already part of our world in efforts to reconcile human with natural needs, the foremost example being the new Bolivian Constitution, enacted with indigenous inspiration, that grants to nature rights similar to those enjoyed by humans. Can the world be persuaded to follow the example of Bolivia, overcoming the hegemony of an ecologically and socially destructive developmentalism that capitalism and the search for national power have rendered into a global faith? This is the

49) Stedile, *op. cit.*, p. 42.

50) For a collection of recent discussions, see Bonaventura de Sousa Santos, *Another Knowledge is Possible: Beyond Northern Epistemologies* (London: Verso, 2007). For an indigenous perspective, see Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*, *op. cit.*

challenge. It, too, requires a “cultural revolution” in the imagination of social and political life no less than of poverty and wealth.

Besides, it is important to recall once again that utopianism is an indispensable precondition of transformative politics. Given past experiences with future visions that were to betray their believers, few these days speak of where the struggles of the present may lead. Fear of utopia creates its own anxieties about futures without purpose, at the mercy of unfathomable structural forces. The utopia we should learn to think through is hope in the possibility of a more just and sustainable world. Its specifics must come from the dialectics of the movement itself as it articulates needs and visions not of an off-ground global capitalism but of the many worlds we inhabit that are grounded in places.

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