

Porto Alegre Notebook

Scenes of Resistance in the Global South

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Visit www.westernstatescenter.org to read Tarso's full account of the World Social Forum

In January 2003, I joined the 100,000 *plus* people who descended on Porto Alegre, Brasil from 156 countries for the 3rd annual World Social Forum (WSF): four days of marches, workshops, debates, and speeches. The event was founded as a people's response to the World Economic Forum—the annual gathering of governments and business elites usually held in the luxury resort of Davos, Switzerland. Organized in and for the global South (Latin America, the Caribbean, Africa and Asia), this year's WSF was welcomed with open arms (not the tear gas and riot police of Seattle) by the host city.

The scale of the WSF was dizzying. We were like a city within a city, a huge bazaar of left/progressive ideas and political tendencies. Not surprisingly, some of the most exciting action at the WSF took place in the streets. Enormous opening and closing marches highlighted the contrast between Latin American protest culture and the staid processions so common in the United States.



The Forum included a series of workshops and a film about *Quilombos*.

The Quilombos are descendents of Afro-Brazilians who escaped slavery to form free societies, or took over plantation lands upon abolition. (The largest of these, Palmares, was home to 100,000 people at its peak and survived for a century despite annual military campaigns to bring it down.) Over one hundred such communities—*Quilombos*—survive in Brasil today, ranging from dozens to hundreds of residents. Most lack title to their land and are fighting against thievery by farmers and real estate speculators.

WSF 2004

The next annual WSF will be held in Mumbai (formerly Bombay), India in January 2004 in order to better involve social movements from Asia and Africa in the visioning of "another world." In 2005, the event is scheduled to return to Porto Alegre.

www.forumsocialmundial.org.br

Palestinian and Israeli peace activists read their "Letter from Porto Alegre."

The emotional climax of the Forum came during the final session at Gigantinho stadium as Palestinian and Israeli activists read a joint statement calling for: the creation of a Palestinian state alongside Israel based on 1967 borders and with Jerusalem as the capital of each of the two states; a just resolution to the Palestinian refugee problem; and United Nations intervention to end violence on both sides and bring about a just and lasting peace. Cheers filled the stadium as the Palestinian/Israeli delegation linked hands and joined the crowd in singing John Lennon's "Imagine."

www.peacenow-uk.org/htdocs/contents/PNbrazil.htm





**Samba as protest: the PSTU chant
“Against FTAA and capital! Our
fight is international!”**

In January, the build-up to Brazilian carnival was well underway and the United Socialist Workers Party of Brasil (PSTU) demonstrated that samba could be a form of protest, with lively chants and formation dancing in their section of the marches.

**A transgender Brazilian woman falls
to the ground, interrupting the march.**

The sign on her body reads, “Discrimination kills in every place on earth. To respect sexual diversity is also possible.” After a moment, she runs off to “die” someplace else along the march.



Photo credits: Tarso Luís Ramos



**“Stop Selling Brasil!”
The Brazilian flag
morphs into a U.S. one.**

Privatized state enterprises are shown among the stars in the U.S. flag, while remaining public utilities are shown on the Brazilian side.

**“Another World
Possible”**

— official slogan of the
World Social Forum

“If we look at this conflict as a straightforward eye-ball to eye-ball confrontation between Empire and those of us who are resisting it, it might seem that we are losing. But there is another way of looking at it. We, all of us gathered here, have, each in our own way, laid siege to Empire. We may not have stopped it in its tracks—yet—but we have stripped it down. We have made it drop its mask. We have forced it into the open. It now stands before us on the world's stage in all its brutish, iniquitous nakedness. Empire may well go to war, but it's out in the open now—too ugly to behold its own reflection. Too ugly even to rally its own people. It won't be long before the majority of American people become our allies.”

— Arundhati Roy

Excerpt from 2003 World Social Forum speech

www.peacewomen.org/resources/voices/declar/arundhati.html