Outside and against the Quincentenary: modern indigenous representations at the time of the Colombian celebrations

Jeremy Smith

University of Ballarat, Australia

Celebrations in 1992 of the Colombus' so-called Colombian Discovery of the Americas were a focal point for coalescence of trans-Atlantic activism. The initial invisibility of Amerindian peoples in planned official proceedings became a source of conflict and was countered with instances of self-representation in conferences, protests, networks, ceremonies and interventions in public debate. In response to exclusion from Quincentennial discourse, indigenous movements coordinated protest across the Atlantic sphere. They achieved a worldwide hearing for perspectives that revolved around visions for differentiated citizenship that entailed (a) inter-nation compacts that were implicitly civilizational and (b) assertions of indigenous historicity and bold claims around environmental guardianship. This essay begins to explore the vernacular of the social movement that developed at this juncture through a comparative sociological study of continental coordination. It counter-poses the heritage of Euro-American images of fossilized Indian civilizations to living assertions for various forms of sovereignty. It is argued, following the multiple modernities current of [to? In?] contemporary sociology, that the transnational politics generated during this stormy episode are part of what can be characterized as an indigenous modernity.

KEYWORDS Quincentenary; commemoration; alitysocial movement; sovereignty; indigenous modernity.

Introduction

reexamines The year 1992 should have been memorable for the Quincentenary celebrations of Columbus' voyage across the Atlantic. The political and historiographic controversy around this commemorative episode ensured that it

was not. Strangely, the controversy itself, which generated great heat and noise at the time, seemed to fade from public discussion all too quickly. In this essay, I review this episode as one of commemoration, protest, historical revision and alliance-building for indigenous American social movements. The failure of the Colombian Quincentenary to reach the heights of civilisational celebration hoped for by its originators marked a new beginning in trans-national activity for indigenous movements. It was a potent reminder of the existence of the 'Other' Americas, but it also staked a lasting claim for what can be characterized as an indigenous modernity.

MORE HERE – A QUOTE MAYBE?

This essay re-visits this period to discuss the impact of emergent trans-national indigenous consciousness. This is discussed as a kind of modernity, assuming the position held by comparative sociologists that the contemporary world is shaped by multiple modernities,,and not a singular process of modernization that originated in the West theory's established premise of a universal logic of social dexploration ofpaths.¹ This article joins vital metatheoretical revisions in the comparative social sciences to the issue of the Quincentenary commemorations byfocuses o specifically addressing "Atlantic modernity", which is neither strictly Western nor American, but was born of the historical connection between the two hemispheres created by European

¹ Ben-Rafael and Sternberg, *Comparing Modernities*, Guerra, *Modernidad e Independencia*, Eisenstadt *Comparative Civilizations and Multiple Modernities* and Roniger and Waisman, *Globality and Multiple Modernities*.

colonialism.² Furthermore, in addition to Atlantic modernity, their article traces the outline of an indigenous modernity coextensive with Atlantic modernity, yet distinct in itself. It emerged from the survival and transformation of indigenous nations.³ Examination of emergent indigenous modernity within the Atlantic world brings a radical edge to debates within the field of comparative studies about the West's accumulated conception of civilization that came out of the Conquest. It is in tune with a discernible indigenous turn in the human sciences. In the context of the Quincentenary, it can be seen that social movements which took a new turn in the 1990s with challenged the romantic image of indigenous cultures as "traditional", historical and noble remnants of the past. Instead, indigenous nations were shown to be present, vivacious and modern in their own ways. The current article illustrates how they issued such a challenge through the development of continental new networks and alliances and a fresh politics of sovereignty and environmental guardianship.⁴ Above all, the civilizationality of Indigenous activists' and this social movement's Contemporary Amerindian perspectives reflects indigenous modernity in the forms of social agency that they mobilized, and the international appeals they made and the potential for a "genuine encounter of two civilizations" that they promoted. Some examples of those perspectives appear later in later passages.

This article is based on a modest comparative sociological study of the rise in indigenous activist coordination across the Atlantic sphere in the early

² I develop an expanded historical sociology of Atlantic modernity in Smith *Europe and the Americas*.

³ The notion of indigenous modernity is developed by Rundell in an essay that addresses the Australian context. See, "Indigenous Modernities".

⁴ On the notion of indigenous modernity see Rundell, "Indigenous Modernities".

1990s. The scholarship on this controversy period is voluminous, but shows two significant shortfalls.⁵ There was much interest in debates about intrinsic worth of Western civilization, with, surprisingly, little attention paid to the direct arguments made at the time by indigenous social movements. Social theorists have not paid attention to this episode of protest; likewise few researchers have applied social theory in new and inventive ways. When the published scholarship is descriptive, it lacks analysis that is wiser for the benefit of retrospection; few valuable books are published after 1996.⁶ Even when the histories are at their best, the episode still wants for greater theoretical rigour. Nonetheless, notwithstanding this shortcoming, the secondary literature is an important source of historical details, perspectives and as records of debate.

Research informing this article The current project is based on a close textual reading of (i) written works on the 1992 controversy and (ii) key Quincentennial publications and (iii) indigenous communiqués and newsletters of coordinating campaign organizations and perspectives of leading figures in the movement. A wide range of primary materials were analyzed including materials published in hard copy form, electronic media and available on major activist websites. The focus is on indigenous expression. Ethical and political considerations were foremost as past primary research on indigenous communities has often been saturated with colonial intent and epistemological

⁵ By way of contrast, the scholarship on Contact and Conquest is of a high caliber. See Altman and Butler, 'The Contact of Cultures.'

⁶ Block, "Quincentennial Publishing".

design.⁷⁷ Its effect, if not its explicit intention, has been to suppress claims to land and sovereignty. The project behind this essay was conceived with concerns about intercultural research in mind and consequently seeks to publicize Amerindian counter-perspectives on colonialism and the meanings attached to Colombian commemoration, which can now be seen clearly as a contested ground. The purpose of such an examination is not to disclose views that might be construed or presented as authentic, indigenous self-representation, but to hermeneutically foster better understanding through contact with vitally different perspectives neglected in public debate. It involves a “theorizing off” the materials produced by the movement to expand the interpretive and historiographical spectrum encompassing the Quincentennial controversy. Following a recounting of events around the Quincentennial year, the article delves into then turns to a consideration of the marginalization of Amerindian peoples by modern republican states. This is followed by an outline of the form of alliance-building developed during the revolt against Columbus celebrations. At the end of the article I examine looks at the context of the assertion of sovereignty over different spheres of life and how these reflect an underlying alternative civilizational vision.

Celebrations Launched – Commemorations Sunk

⁷⁷ See Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies* for a summary of issues in researching with indigenous communities.

A chronology of Columbus remembrance is instructive in itself with respect to, firstly, the invisibility of indigenous America and then to subsequent attempts to incorporate representations of it. The pre-history shows an astonishing lack of enthusiasm for the date of his landfall or for the cause of “Discovery”. The first New World celebration was only at the three hundred year mark in 1792 and it was a modest affair lacking in enthusiasm.⁸ The landscape was cartographically imperial. There were no robust nation states to claim Columbus’ heritage. The new US only developed a consensus around a national calendar of remembrance in the mid-nineteenth century.⁹ The quatercentenary was the first notable event to mark the Colombian epoch, far outstripping in cost and magnitude any prior American festival.¹⁰ In keeping with the contemporary Western and imperial inclination for large-scale displays of global power, the US organized the World’s Colombian Exposition.¹¹ There, the memory of Columbus was pressed into the service of American commerce, which boasted its wealth and modernity through the Exposition, citywide parades and pageants. A spate of monument erection, hagiography writing and city naming followed to help sustain the memory of the Admiral. To be sure, both American and Italian scholarship was busy producing hagiographies of great Columbus. But in 1892In contrast, there was a dearth of public celebration in Italy itself. Clearly North Americans

⁸ Bushman, *America Discovers Columbus*, 189-190; Handlin, *Discovering Columbus* and Sale, *The Conquest of Paradise*, 338-9.

⁹ Bodner, *Remaking America*, chapter two; Gillis, *Commemorations*; Lowenthal, *The Past is a Foreign Country*, 105-124. On Anglo-American debates about naming the republic the United States of America or a derivative of Columbus’ name, see Hincapié, *Historia*, chapter two.

¹⁰ Sale, *The Conquest of Paradise* 350-3.

¹¹ Bushman, *America Discovers Columbus*, 161-5.

(including Italian-Americans) were laying claim to the Colombian heritage as an American liberated from the shackles of the Old World.¹²

The conception of the Quincentenary was Spanish in origins. Organising Committees were inaugurated as early as 1979 to prepare events.¹³ When Spain took a proposal to celebrate “the meeting of two worlds” to the United Nations in 1982, it caused a diplomatic palaver and failed to gain support. Irish and Scandinavian representatives pointed out that they broke the Atlantic barrier first. Delegates from fifty African countries decamped in protest. They returned with a joint statement declaring outrage that the UN would even consider endorsement of an event that venerated colonialism. Once the diplomatic palaver had cleared, it was evident that the UN would not be supporting any Quincentennial events. Spain went ahead, directly connecting it the Quincentenary with the Barcelona Summer Olympics and Expo 92. The US Government provided US\$79 million to the Quincentennial Jubilee Commission in 1984 to act as official guardian of the Colombian heritage.¹⁴ Some thirty-four countries participated in the multinational extravaganza. Spain exceeded all committing, by one estimate,¹⁵ more than US\$5 billion.¹⁶ More than twenty states in the US planned to mark Columbus Day in 1992—a new high water mark in that country.

The Quincentenary was an international affair which in the Atlantic world commemorated the accomplishments of a Western civilizational rather than

¹² Grande and Paolucci, “American Foundations”, King, *The Liberty of Strangers*, p.64, Mignone, *Columbus: Meeting of Cultures* and Summerhill and Williams, *Sinking Columbus*, 10-16.

¹³ Block, “Quincentennial Publishing”.

¹⁴ For a list of projects see Goldie, “In Fourteen Hundred and Ninety Two”.

¹⁵ Kilian, “New World of Hype”.

¹⁶ Kilian, “New World of Hype”.

those of version of the past and not any Western nation alone in particular. Its indigenous opposition was portrayed as a protest mobilization. From another angle, it can be regarded as a commemorative movement of a different kind marking remembrance of indigenous experiences of five hundred years of European occupation. This was a clash of commemorations, pitting the figure of Columbus, a symbol intended to demonstrate unbroken continuity with five hundred years of history, against the renewed symbolic challenge of indigenous memory. The latter is memory of civilizations which have been at the margins of Euro-American self-consciousness, excluded from social power and barbarized in popular perceptions. Their presence has not been acknowledged in public life and their traditions seen as a basis for their inevitable demise in the face of modern society. At the outset, official preparations for 1992 left America's indigenous peoples unambiguously on the outside. It wasn't until plans for counter-Quincentennial activities began to coalesce that the contestability of official interpretations emerged as the principal issue. It momentarily became the centerpiece of the so-called Culture Wars in the US about the status of Western civilization, which resonated throughout the continent.^v

The stakes were raised by the tone of the events planned. Plans in the American states to mark Columbus Day were civilizational in content, and minimized any ethnic or national specificity.¹⁷ By way of contrast, Spain and Italy proudly proclaimed Columbus as theirs and incorporated his figure into nationalist commemoration. In doing so, they acted with comparative indifference to the civilizationality thrust of the public debates in the United States. A shift in

¹⁷ Summerhill and Williams, *Sinking Columbus*, chapter four.

promotional discourse from “discovery” to “encounter” and from “celebration” to “commemoration” was widely noted. While an apparent concession to the cultural claims of opponents in North America, it served to underline the civilizational gist of the controversy by drawing attention to the two juxtaposed perspectives on America’s past; one that is Western (“from the ship”) and one “from the shore”.

The two perspectives collided in debates over the meaning of America’s history. In the end, for a time it appeared that historical revision would characterize many of the official public projects associated with the Quincentenary in the US. Clearly, at variance with the original intentions of the Reagan administration and with initial public expectations, the Quincentenary Jubilee Commission, the Smithsonian Institute and the National Endowment for the Humanities moved to finance projects that mainly profiled the deleterious historical processes set in train by the intrusion of Europeans into the Atlantic world. Several key features of the revisionist view were imported into public projects: full acknowledgement of the inhabited America world of 1492, complete coverage of the breadth and depth of the impact of Europeans on the Americas and even to a degree the exterminatory cultures of European colonialism, and reconstruction of the historical vocabulary to eliminate anachronisms such as “discovery”. These are touted by supporters of the funding bodies as recognition of the “view from the shore”.¹⁸ As 1992 approached, however, and the conflagration of the culture wars increased, fewer critical projects received

¹⁸ See the Smithsonian Institute’s first issue of its newsletter, *The New World*, in particular, Alicia Maria Gonzalez, “The New World”. See also Crosby “Rethinking the Encounter”, Axtell, “Colombian Encounters” and Reber and Madden “Introduction”.

grants and the Commission retreated in the face of Rightist criticism.¹⁹ There were marked “backlashes to the Columbus backlash”²⁰ as conservatism lined up to rail against what they alleged was insidious multicultural orthodoxy. Public institutions retreated to the safer ground of exhibits and content that portrayed all views without editorial comment.

Nonetheless, revisionism was firmly entrenched in public debates. The large audience found by the landmark book *The Conquest of Paradise* by US Greens Party leader Kirkpatrick Sale popularized the Left's critique in the US. The National Council of Churches came out in damning condemnation of Columbus and educational guides re-designing the history of European intrusion spread rapidly.²¹ Controversially, the American Library Association resolved that libraries ought [to] highlight Native American perspectives and recast the encounter as a holocaust. The Reagan and Bush administration's preference for the privatization of large-scale events foundered. Potential corporate sponsors were disinterested. In the end, there were few official public festivities and commemorations in the US outside of museums, libraries and galleries. On the whole, the achievements of the Quincentennial Commission did not meet the ambitions of its founders and the historical narratives that they supported did not memorialize Columbus' “discovery”. They faltered because of the cultural doubt that unexpectedly emerged displacing the feeling of celebration that the year was

¹⁹ Lunenfield, “Columbus Bashing”.

²⁰ Achenbach, “Debating Columbus”, 11.

²¹ In Latin America, Church authorities were even more emphatic in their rejection of the Quincentenary commemoration. See Vallejo, *Quinto centenario*.

meant to inspire.²² The vociferation of indigenous opposition from North to South intensified that doubt.

Despite historical revisionism, Native American communities and organizations were still mostly left out of the process as indeed they were in all participating countries. Moreover, while a more comprehensive picture of the conflict and devastation that Columbus' landfall foreshadowed emerged, and while indigenous histories were increasingly airedheard, the invisibility of surviving peoples and their modern problems and solutions generally continued.²³ Amerindian heritage was represented in different modes: movies, art exhibitions, a host of coffee-table compilations of exhibitions, bibliographical works and encyclopaedia, teaching kits and manuals, university curricula, magazines and newsletters, television and documentary features, conferences and seminars and museum, archive and library projects. The current-day existence of indigenous Americans was obscured in such public representations. Where they did appear it was in the context of their heritage and not their modernity.

The creation of aboriginality in the Atlantic's republics

Images which were at once romantic and obscuring that represented America's indigenous cultures as anti-modern and pre-modern came under direct challenge. I will discuss that challenge after sketching out a history of the

²² Summerhill and Williams, *Sinking Columbus*.

²³ See Chapin, "Contemporary Indians" for a commentary on this absence in American planning.

marginalization of Amerindian worlds, or the “making” of America’s aboriginalities. It involves . However, I note in passing that it would have to e three elements:: an analysis of the legal constitution of pre-existing native sovereignties, forms of cultural recognition and representation and the emergence of contemporary Indian consciousness that started in the 1970s.

The colonial seizure and transformation of land The historical source of the alienation of Amerindian civilizations is the seizure and transformation of indigenous lands. Indigenous experiences of and its consequences varied throughout the Americas within the three major European empires depending on how they and succeeding nation states reconstituted civilizational identities. I deal with the British and then Spanish American historical experiences in turn. British imperial authorities developed a juridical notion of sovereignty during their rule in the North Americas.²⁴ Although British colonial culture had an exterminatory face, the legal framework introduced limits on settler expansion and the terms on which territory could be possessed. Their encounters with Indian nations brought them face-to-face with some aspects of sophisticated indigenous cultures that they recognized as ‘civilized’. The most consequential of these was the indigenous polities and systems of customary law that the English adjudged to be self-conceived national entities. The 1763 Royal Proclamation settled the matter of indigenous land control as far as the British were concerned. Tribal lands could not be legally seized, except in the circumstances of a sale by native authorities or where territory was yielded through a bona fide treaty. To be sure, British motives involved sealing the Western frontier, securing the position

²⁴ See Pocock, ‘Virtues, Rights and Manners’

of mercantile monopolies and encouraging the fur trade in the interior through this measure. Nonetheless, the declaration temporarily protected Indian lands. In the nineteenth century, the US initially took a nuanced approach.²⁵ Where Spanish jurisprudence had relied on natural law conceptions in sixteenth century debates about the rights of indigenous peoples to dominion, US courts increasingly developed findings within a positivist framework of international and Federal law. All legal approaches to this point had hesitated on the question of the anthropological characterization of the humanity of the indigene; indeed, it was the degree of development/civilizationality of their societies and cultures that was in doubt in both frameworks. In the United States, important shifts in the movement towards positivism in law were marked by three judgments which realized a transition from the natural law philosophy of Vattel to principles of positivist jurisprudence: *Johnson v McIntosh*, *Cherokee Nation v Georgia* and *Worcester v Georgia*.²⁶ The consistent conclusion, based on the notion of the “pretension of discovery”, was that the original nations were not *foreign* nations in international law or under the Constitution. They were “domestic dependent nations”—political communities to be sure, but special ones that were under the protection of the United States to which they had submitted in the various treaties settled.²⁷ Twentieth century determinations, made in a more strictly positivist framework that accorded no rights to Indian nations, were unequivocal on this point. Sovereignty could not be recognized and the United States held a duty of trusteeship, which it exercised within a paradigm of paternalism.

²⁵ See Brown, “Native Americans”.

²⁶ Anaya, *Indigenous Peoples*, chapter one and Keal, *European Conquest*, chapters one to three.

²⁷ The infelicitous phrase derives from *Cherokee Nation v State of Georgia* (1831).

The treaties and treaty making were facts, however. The British settled over one hundred and fifty treaties and the US federal state continued the practice, almost without exception, as a ruse for the theft of land. The difference was that the republic had been born of a revolution that derived its confederative notion of sovereignty from a philosophy of natural rights developed in a *settler* society; i.e. out of frontier experiences of acquiring land from Indian nations by force and deception.²⁸ Conquest in effect gave colonists settling fresh territory a right under natural law to ownership which over-ruled Indian sovereignty. As natural law waned, frontier seizures created the impression of ongoing occupation. Indian sovereignty seemed to diminish as the United States reached its final territorial boundaries.

Aside from the debates within international and Federal law at the time, the juridical determination of indigeneity alienated established a historical identity. Treaty-making cast Indian nations into a legal form that—when combined with evolutionist insistence on their inexorable demise and the violence of frontier settlement and missionary “civilizing”—pictured them as “historical” peoples with no current presence other than a spectral, dying one. This was the experience of a conception of civilization that alienated. Reconceived in legal terms, the multifaceted sophistication of Native American cultures was condensed into a form where its rights-at-law could be debated and

²⁸ Pocock, “Empire, State and Confederation”. Compare with Williams, *The American Indian* who argues that the transition from imperial to republican notions of sovereignty occurred primarily in the political foundation of the United States and not with the Marshall determinations.

determined.²⁹ Without a right to the land, they could be cast pictured as artifacts of the past. Landlessness denied them modern presence in the law as well as a connection to the sources of their historicity. In culture, they were historical civilizations portrayed as uncultivated and rudimentary, whether they were represented as “savage” or “noble”.

As survivals, they may have been regarded with sadness and even mild regret. There are similarities with the Maori and islander experience in New Zealand and Australian Aborigines, although the latter were subject to a legal notion of *terra nullius* that the British deployed to render them utterly unrecognizable, firstly in empirical terms and then in juridical ones.³⁰ Treaty making was not widely contemplated as an option in an “empty land”.

Without exception, the denial of the Indian nations’ sovereignty facilitates adds up to an objectification of “lost” peoples and tribes. Such objectification occurs in museum and archaeological exhibits, the commoditization of their arts and representations of savagery in popular culture. They were “made” or determined in part through such representations.

For comparative purposes, it is useful to take measure of how Anglo-American experiences square up against those of the Hispanic Americas. Generalization is both difficult and hazardous, but the following observations should not draw dispute. The Spanish and the Creole republics lacked all legal compacts with the conquered *indios*. Instead, hierarchical social orders

²⁹ For two quite different surveys of the complexity of Native American civilization, see Snow, *The Iroquois* and Mills, *Mythology*, 422-73

³⁰ See Reynolds, *Aboriginal Sovereignty* on Australia.

developed that variously incorporated indigenous peoples.³¹ Imperial states were centralist and legalistic in their structure, but could not resist the imperatives of decentralization that they confronted. Spain was a reference point for ruling administrators, but not necessarily Creole and indigenous subjects who felt strong ties to the land. Centralism continued in the early years of the modern republics, but was tempered by new collective identities which had a wider range of external models to reflect upon.³² Republican elites sought to learn from other examples. But there was always disparity between outside models and social realities.³³ The American Revolution had been an inspiration for Latin American republicanism at their point of founding states. However, they were not able to forge fully-fledged public spheres such as those that had been vital to the American Revolution. Consequently, they lacked civil equality. Citizenship was therefore constitutional formality, while hierarchical ethos the social reality. A deep-seated logic of patrician rule defined systems of representation and excluded slaves, ex-slaves and the Indians from the political community.³⁴ Much like the US, indigenous economic and social systems were not going to play a major part in the construction of the social order. Unlike the US, however, some republics generated segmented social spaces in which coexistence was possible, albeit in ongoing tension with internal civil conflicts and violence. Despite

³¹ Eisenstadt notes regionalized patterns here. Uruguay and Argentina form a white-dominated river plate pattern; Colombia and Chile rest on *mestizo* culture and demography; Peru, Mexico, Bolivia and Ecuador form an IndoAmerican zone where types of incorporation reinforce strict hierarchy, while visible multiraciality is determinant in Brazil, Cuba and other Caribbean societies. See "The Civilizations of the Americas".

³² Roniger and Waisman, "Approaching Multiple Modernities".

³³ Roniger, "Global Immersion" and Bracho, *El discurso de la inconformidad*. CHECK ALSO BN SOURCES FOR OTHER REFERENCES ON THIS POINT

³⁴ See Guerra, "The Spanish-American Tradition".

this, it became a 'fact' of civilizational coexistence that. In Indo-America, where indigenous peoples were a majority or near majority, a weightier presence was felt and Indians featured more prominently at the centers of social life. Moreover, their traditions were blended more thoroughly. This visibility is a constant reminder of the Colombian confrontation at the root of Atlantic modernity.

This overview of South America typifies the general alienation of living modern indigeneity that was undeniably featured in the multinational Quincentenary. While the design of Quincentennial projects variously included representations of the historical Indian civilizations, precious little emerged publicly about their contemporary living conditions or potential destiny. The alternative memorialization of the Colombian era drew attention to other social problems that were to that point concealed in the Quincentenary: access to land, self-determination of communities, fishing and hunting rights, violence and the threats to communities, ill-health, education, crime, poverty, employment and housing. Mainstream media did not reflect them well the nuances of counter-Quincentennial politics at the time.. But they are evident in the representative materials generated by the movements themselves. The current argument now turns to the movements' mobilization and alliance building around 1992 before examining the self-representations that emerged from it.

From protest to alliance-building

Minor oppositional activity around the Columbus Day anniversary began in the late 1970s with Native American lobbying in the United Nations.³⁵ The UN's Working Group on Indigenous Populations was established in September 1982, just prior to the General Assembly debate on the Quincentenary. To that point, America's indigenous peoples were the only ones without a voice in international fora. OneA second aim was to persuade the UN to declare 1992 the "Year of the World's Indigenous Peoples." That year was declared for 1993, after Spain went to considerable diplomatic lengths to have the original proposal blocked.

The indigenous response to the multinational program of commemoration that subsequently emerged was an unprecedented and unforeseen level of alliance-building and transcontinental organizing. Plans for the "500 Years of Resistance Campaign" were initiated at an international meeting of grassroots groups in Quito in 1987. Hundreds of representatives of diverse coalitions, organizations and nations gathered, once again in Quito, in mid-1990 to stage the First Continental Meeting of Indigenous Peoples—500 Years of Indian Resistance.³⁶ One hundred and twenty nations from twenty American states were represented. They unanimously affirmed unequivocal opposition to the planned celebrations. This initiative was continental in scope and purpose and Atlantic in its impact, a development that Cree poet Susan Harjo believes is portended in many Amerindian traditions:

³⁵ Dunbar-Ortiz, "Christopher Columbus", 17-8.

³⁶ See the 'Declaration of Quito' and *The Temoaya Declaration*.

As far as I know, and as anyone else knew who was there, it was one of the most comprehensive such hemispheric meetings of indigenous peoples. I immediately think of prophecies and how many are being fulfilled at this time of the century. *Here was the meeting of the condor and the eagle.*³⁷

The meeting resolved to support continent-wide cooperation between movements organizing counter-Quincentennial activities. As a sharing experience, it turned up common problems which different nations and peoples confronted. A. On the positive side, a common vernacular of “survival”, “sustainability”, “sovereignty” and “resistance” was also evident and the source of pride and celebration. At the same time, diverse national conditions contextualized the priorities of various coalitions and organizations. In recognition of national autonomy, the form of movement organization considered appropriate was continental coordination. The Ecuadorian hosts undertook to initiate further networking, while the South and Meso American Indian Information Center (SAIIC) agreed to act as a communications node. A coordinating commission—*Coordinadora de Organizaciones y Naciones Indigenas del Continente* (CONIC)—was established with the remit to hold a second *encuentro* or continental meeting in the year of 1992 itself. Indeed, the next such gathering had to wait until 1993. However, interim regional meetings, an organizing meeting of the coordinating commission and even a continental *encuentro* of

³⁷ Susan Harjo is a former Executive Director of the National Congress of American Indians and Founding Trustee of the National Museum of the American Indian. The quote is cited in Dunbar-Ortiz, “Columbus”, 17, emphasis added.

indigenous journalists successfully gathered indigenous leaders and activists from right around the Americas.³⁸

When the CONIC organized a second continental encounter, it had become evident that there had been an extension and intensification of international networking.³⁹ It would seem that America's indigenous people had rediscovered one another; partly as a result of the Quincentenary.⁴⁰ The campaign created multi-sector networks that strengthened the later groundswell in South America against neo-liberalism. It established new potential for interaction in the Atlantic sphere that was previously untapped.⁴¹ Moreover, it contributed to international connections between Amerindian nations and "global agents" (information networks, human rights groups, NGOs, political parties) in forms of organizing that went beyond local-national loci to create worldwide networks of indigenous organizations.⁴² Global and Western environmental movements and the new indigenous alliances enjoyed the mutual benefits of cooperation,⁴³ although it's clear in retrospect that this represented dangers as well as opportunities for Amerindian movements. In the general upsurge in the Americas, a critical mass was reached such that this can be characterized as the outgrowth of an indigenous Atlantic sphere. It built on the multiple, overlapping

³⁸ See *SAIIC Newsletter*. Volume 6, nos. 1-3.

³⁹ See Selverstone-Scher, "Overview".

⁴⁰ Wright, *Stolen Continents*, 342-6 and Stavenhagen, "Return of the Native"

⁴¹ America Latina en movimiento, "Campana 500 anos" and León et al *Movimientos sociales*, chapter three.

⁴² Mato, "On Global-Local Connections" and "Transnational Networking".

⁴³ Van Cott, "Defiant Again", chapter two.

levels of identity and representation and thereby added to coexisting spheres of indigenous community organization.⁴⁴

Direct protest activity against the Quincentennial is remembered for the actions that took place in the US. Demonstrations in San Francisco, Los Angeles and Denver were the largest and most successful. In Denver, where the Columbus Day parade had originated, the 1992 anniversary was stopped by a long and vigorous campaign led by the American Indian Movement.⁴⁵ Less eye catching, though no less effective, was the growth of organizational resources dedicated to coordination of counter-Quincentenary protest in South America: radio programs, educational resources, information centers, virtual networks, aggregated media resources and special issue projects.⁴⁶ Less publicized protests Fnentoutside of Hispanic America were other Quincentennial protests; the best publicized occurred in Ecuador, Brazil, Mexico, Bolivia and Colombia.⁴⁷ In numerical terms, these were larger than those in the North American states. In addition to direct public protests, there were many public events south of the US too too numerous to listt in individually: conferences, seminars, symposia, workshops, spiritual gatherings, cross-border reunions, cross-nation walks and memorials. In the years leading up to 1992, indigenous revolt reached higher levels with outright rebellions taking place in Oka (Quebec), Ecuador (in 1990) and Amazonian Brazil in the late 1980s. Border conflicts involved struggles over

⁴⁴ Brysk, *From Tribal Village*, 38.

⁴⁵ Morris, "Coalitions and Alliances" and Churchill, *Acts of Rebellion*, 180-1. A longer history of the continuing fight between Italian-American Columbus supporters and the AIM is presented by de Yoanna and Langeland in "Ground Zero".

⁴⁶ See *SAIIC Newsletter*, Volume Six. See also Howard Zinn's audit of activities, *A People's History*, pp.265-269.

⁴⁷ Congreso nacional indigena, "Marco Histórico".

indigenous access to resources embroiled Colombia, Peru, Venezuela, Paraguay and Ecuador.⁴⁸ While these are not directly Quincentennial activities, the Colombian anniversary can be and was viewed as a culmination of growing resistance throughout the Americas. Many developmentsEvents that followed the Quincentenary resonate withthechoes (sense?)es oppositional perspectives voiced in 1992. Of course, the most spectacular of these was the Zapatista Rebellion that swept Chiapas and then the rest of Mexico. It continued the bridge building that commenced in 1992 and mobilized the invisibility of indigenous peoples itself as a motif of resistance.⁴⁹ Indigenous nations' involvement in the World Social Forum also continued partnerships built earlier.

Affirmation of modern indigeneity

If this period is interpreted through a critical theory of recognition, then counter-Quincentenary organization can be defined as an exemplary movement in a state of emergence affirming transnational moral claims born of common historical experiences of oppression.⁵⁰ International recognition is evident in the expanded platform for indigenous peoples in the UN.⁵¹ The *Draft Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* and the Year and Decade of Indigenous Peoples attest to enhanced global standing. So also do the peak body summits organized under

⁴⁸ *500 Years of Resistance*, Van Cott, "Defiant Again", chapter one.

⁴⁹ McDonald, *Global Movements*, pp.111-139.

⁵⁰ Honneth, *Struggle for Reconition* and "Moral Consciousness". For an excellent commentary on the crucial radicality of Honneth's early work in theorizing a paradigm of recognition, see Deranty, "Injustice, Violence and Social Struggle".

⁵¹ For a brief history of the expanded space at the UN for indigenous peoples of the Atlantic world, see Brysk, *From Tribal Village*, pp.249-253.

the auspices of UN Good Will Ambassador for Indigenous Peoples Rigaberta Menchu.⁵² To be sure, the UN is regarded by Amerindian organizations in a variety of ways ranging from indifference to deep suspicion to outright contempt. However, recognition by the world body illustrates the effectiveness of transnational organizing in the climate of hermeneutical suspicion of the civilizational claims made for the Colombian epoch that is detailed above.

What was impressed upon the world body was an active social movement with prominent counter claims. The interruption of a celebratory Quincentennial history of the Atlantic world by intervention of indigenous protest brought to the surface what I regard as four dimensions of sovereignty and a diverse and modern indigenous field of political philosophy. The four dimensions are sovereignty in polity and self-determination; in land; in welfare; and in historical and ontological self-understanding; that is, in *historicity*. Often “sovereignty” is identified understood in Western political thought only where the first: sovereignty means a stable polityies exist. In contrast, there are many different indigenous conceptions of sovereignty. Affirmations of indigenous sovereignty in the Americas variously draw on pre-Colombian social imaginaries for their contents. But they are undeniably modern and emerge in response not only to contemporary boosterist versions of Atlantic history, but also to new regimes of neo-liberalism, especially in Central and South America.⁵³ From northern Canada to the cone of Latin America, different blueprints for self-determination

⁵² *The Oaxtepec Declaration* and the *United Nations Draft Declaration*.

⁵³ Roniger, “Global Immersion”, 86-7.

incorporate several options.⁵⁴ Constitutional reforms are sought to protect indigenous rights. Some entail a model of differentiated citizenship. Plurinationalism or pluri-culturalism is supported widely in Latin America, especially where indigenous peoples are small in number. Inter-nation compacts and agreements within revamped structures of federalism are being actively pursued and have been reached in Canada and the US.⁵⁵ Shared territorial sovereignty involving self-government and autonomy is a common goal. Outright secession is still sought by some. There is little space to discuss them here except to note that the merits of different models are still being openly debated. Much of the UN documentation of debate about indigenous sovereignty allows for nuanced interpretation of what “self-determination” might mean.⁵⁶ This reflects the variety of Amerindian histories informing contemporary conceptions of sovereignty, on one hand, and the diverse approaches of American states that confront “nations within”, on the other.

The debate responds also to the mode of Euro-American state formation. Atlantic states operate within a juridical framework derived from the Westphalian tradition of national integration. Sovereignty remains indivisible in the political imagination of Atlantic states. For the US and Canada the situation is doubly complicated by the commitments made by those states to multiculturalism.⁵⁷ In South America, the lingering tradition of centralist rule leaves little room for any

⁵⁴ See Selverstone-Scher, “Overview” and *The Quito Declaration*. For historical background and commentaries on these models, see Keal, *European Conquest*, 126-36 and Anaya, *Indigenous Peoples*, chapter three.

⁵⁵ Anaya, *Indigenous Peoples*, 188-9.

⁵⁶ See *United Nations Draft Declaration*.

⁵⁷ Kymlicka, “American Multiculturalism”.

devolutionary arrangements as far as ruling elites are concerned.⁵⁸ In contrast, for indigenous communities across the board, the varying forms of political settlement are taken only as a starting point. Self-determination is not limited in definition to the formation of a state or state-like body. The Westphalian notion of a sovereign polity is therefore too constrained to be easily compatible with indigenous notions of self-determination.⁵⁹ The latter are mostly multidimensional and involve all spheres of social life. Thus, a common base is the assertion of regionalized autonomy entailing land, welfare and culture. Sovereignty is a living proposal, an assertion about the life of actually-existing communities.

It is for this reason that I formally distinguish sovereignty in polity from that of land as the latter should not be reduced to a state-led political compact. Most campaigns in the lead-up to 1992 revolved around land.⁶⁰ Resistance was mobilized against the encroachment of military facilities, public infrastructure projects, oil companies, loggers, farmers and ranchers and against the common problem of contamination of land and waterways, especially nuclear contamination. Similar struggles for land and water rights continue throughout the Americas. In many cases, when the issue ends up in court, it becomes evident that sovereignty over land has not been historically ceded at any point. Demands for sovereignty are driven by a politics of survival that declares land essential to economic and ontological security and continuity.⁶¹ It is not only a resource; it is

⁵⁸ See Stavenhagen, *The Return of the Native*. On the centralist tradition in Latin America, see Smith, *Europe and the Americas*, chapter nine.

⁵⁹ This leads some to reject it outright as an alien concept. See, for example, Alfred, *Peace Power and Righteousness*, 55-70.

⁶⁰ See the indigenous land rights reader, *500 Years of Resistance*.

⁶¹ Van Cott, "Defiant Again"

the wellspring of cultural reproduction. It is, in great part measure, through the land that indigeneity is made autonomously by indigenous peoples. Counter-Quincentennial views incorporate a claim that environmental guardianship is better invested in indigenous communities through control over land and water. The ontology of land and life provides a vision of environmental sustainability, according to peak summit documents.⁶²

The issue of welfare is closely related. Welfare should not be understood in the instrumentalist sense that it is within North American state administrations. Rather it denotes indigenous aspirations to flourish. Rigaberta Menchu captured this well when she implored, “Why should we merely survive?”⁶³ Oppositional discourse during and around 1992 pointed to a holistic conception of welfare consistent with indigenous ontology. This is sharply juxtaposed to the instrumentalist welfarism of North American states.

Control over cultural heritage is the most visible issue in the resurgence of indigenous historicity. There are four issues of heritage representation: indigenous control over graves and archaeological excavations, re-interring ancestral remains, the return of artifacts and the representation of heritage.⁶⁴ Again, the United States is a spectacular illustration. The Smithsonian Institute was an interesting crucible of historiographic debates around the Quincentenary in this respect. It was subjected to pressure from all sides.⁶⁵ Its productions included the TV series *The Buried Mirror*, a series of multicultural

⁶² See *Temoaya Declaration* and *Quito Declaration*. The UN *Draft Declaration* also reflects this.

⁶³ Cited in Wright, *Stolen Continents*, 273.

⁶⁴ Brysk, *From Tribal Village*, pp.244-245.

⁶⁵ Gonzalez, “*The New World*”.

symposia and its large-scale *Seeds of Change* exhibition, arguably the only true outcomes of public commemorations in the United States.⁶⁶ In general, it boasted its own turn to living cultures and not extinct societies. Public opinion has been divided over its role. The backdrop is the difficult and relationships with the curatorial, anthropological and archeological professions are ambiguous.⁶⁷ In the past, they have objectified Amerindian in the manner of fossilized civilizations. Yet, they also contain the critical potential to unmask the process whereby Indians have been rendered invisible.⁶⁸ Democratization of the historical human sciences—although still incomplete—has opened up spaces for reinterpretation, altered formats of representation and indigenous direction.⁶⁹ The contested state of political responsibilities of archaeology and anthropology could not have been more obvious during the Columbus controversy.⁷⁰ There is little doubt that opportunities for more far-reaching reform of these representational sciences were passed over and even less doubt that the political pressures of a climate of heightened controversy must have effected impacted on curatorial decisions at the Smithsonian. Indeed, there was widespread criticism of the representational human sciences at this time;⁷¹ the most damning is the suggestion that indigenous America is unrepresentable to Euro-American eyes.⁷²

⁶⁶ See Summerhill and Williams, *Sinking Columbus*.

⁶⁷ Trigger, "Archaeology and the Image"

⁶⁸ Handsman, "Native Americans".

⁶⁹ See, for example, Viola, *After Columbus*.

⁷⁰ Grossman, "Treaty Rights" and Wylie, "Rethinking the Quincentennial".

⁷¹ See Ward Churchill's remarks on Smithsonian anthropology, *Acts of Rebellion*, 285. See also Grossman, "Treaty Rights".

⁷² See Man, "The Metaphysics".

In sum, it is argued that current-day Indian voices were glaringly absent from the official Quincentenary.⁷³ Contextualized by a past in which cultural sovereignty in the arts has been denied, North American aboriginal cultures loudly proclaimed their own philosophies and representational forms during the Quincentennial period.⁷⁴ Protest in the US and Canada featured contemporary Native American arts as powerful oppositional media. As in protest discourse more generally, emphasis lay on the *longue duree*—to use Fernand Braudel’s felicitous phrase in a new context—of aboriginal civilizations and on the celebration of survival.⁷⁵ The deep historicity of the First Nations stood in contrast to the short five hundred years of Euro-American presence.

This feature of the arts is characteristic of a wider confrontation of two broadly ontological senses of history and two broadly ontological conceptions of the world. The longer rhythms of time at the heart of indigenous conceptions of the past beat according to different relationships between land and aboriginal communities. Furthermore, a re-periodization of the Colombian epoch takes place. This is reflected in a re-periodization of the Colombian epoch and it that gives expression to the long-standing Amerindian presence. There are thus three phases: “before the arrival of the invaders, these five hundred years and that period, beginning today, which we must define and build”.⁷⁶ This periodization is not simply counter-celebratory, but rather puts celebration on the terms of indigenous peoples. It centers on survival in the past and sharply draws attention

⁷³ Chapin, “Contemporary Indians”.

⁷⁴ See McMaster and Martin, *Indigena*.

⁷⁵ Braudel, “History and the Social Sciences”.

⁷⁶ “Campaign 500 Years”

to a shared environmental fate for the entire continent. Alliances with environmental organizations bolstered the indigenous vision of a transformed relationship with the Atlantic's ecosystems. Further alliances issued from this perspective after 1992 were as over. The future-oriented perspective tapped into continental and planetary consciousness. In this respect, indigenous historicities with their ecological sensibilities helped to shift the axis of public debate onto issues of the present and prospects for a viable future.

Conclusion: Autonomy and Inter-civilizationality

Two conclusions could be drawn from the activity produced around the pan-Indian encounters of CONIC and similar fora.⁷⁷ The first conclusion could be that critique of the Colombian epoch shows that the two civilizational visions imaginaries of the Atlantic world remain at odds with one another. Indigenous ontologies of community and environment directly inform are at the heart of claims for sovereignty around land rights, political autonomy, independent welfare and cultural self-determination. They conflict irreconcilably with the accumulated heritage of Euro-America in these areas. A second conclusion points to other possibilities, however. There is much in the nuanced vernacular of indigenous opposition to the Colombian commemorations that could nourish inter-civilizational compacts. Indeed, this is explicitly inscribed in the philosophy of "interculturidad" developed in the 1990s by indigenous leaders and practiced

⁷⁷ See the *Quito Declaration*, the *Temoaya Declaration* and "Columbus Didn't Discover Us".

in community development projects.⁷⁸ Contrary to depictions of counter-Quincentenary movements in the mass media, there is an underlying pluralism in the goal of indigenous opposition to celebrate “cultural and racial richness” throughout the northern and southern continent.⁷⁹ Common ground between indigenous philosophies of self-determination and the Western tradition of sovereignty could be found in a more far-reaching federalism.⁸⁰ Genuine autonomy is the pre-condition of the kind of dialogue, or dialogical relation, that would lead to new federal social pacts cast between parties indisputably set on equal footing. Autonomy can be regarded as a sine qua non of a resolution of the paradox of universal rights associated with the nation state and the communal rights that inhere in indigenous communities.⁸¹ In any case, the language of the Quincentenary’s opponents speaks of commencing a genuine encounter that presupposes such autonomy:

By seeking true democracy, true development and making sure that we at least begin to coexist, we can start to create conditions that will allow a genuine encounter of two worlds, of two civilizations in the future.⁸²

⁷⁸ Mignolo, *The Idea of Latin America*, pp.117-120.

⁷⁹ Morris and Means, “Why Autonomous AIM opposes Columbus Day”. See also the video “Columbus Didn’t Discover Us” which contains retrospectives on 1992 and Jaimes, *The State of Native America*.

⁸⁰ Day, “Who is this we?”

⁸¹ Polanco, *Indigenous Peoples in Latin America*, pp.141-2.

⁸² Rigaberta Menchu cited in Wright, *Stolen Continents*, 273. See also Batalla, *Mexico profundo*.

(We look to) a process of construction of the conditions for a true historical encounter of two cultures based on equality, mutual respect, peace and cooperation for independent development.⁸³

The utopia of genuine encountering given voice by Menchu and others is a potential resource of future inter-civilizational courses and new compacts. It could contribute to a kind of rapprochement that would settle the historical questions raised by the commemorations. Paradoxically, the events around the 1992 Quincentenary, which brought into focus the divide between indigenous and non-indigenous Americas, also produced best expressions of indigenous aspiration to an open encounter on equal terms and conquest. It could therefore contribute something unforeseen by its originators to the resolution of the civilizational stand-off that continues in the Atlantic sphere, most prominently in Mesoamerica and the Ando-Amazonian region.

The Quincentenary was a golden opportunity seized by indigenous peoples to advance a modern politics of resistance and renewal that begins with an alternative account of the hemisphere's past. In this article I have advanced a number of arguments that have several theoretical and practical purposes. Firstly, I have given a picture of the groundswell of this Atlantic movement. By showing the vibrancy of contemporary indigenous identity, as I have analyzed it, I aim to illuminate an alternative, indigenous modernity living in Atlantic sphere. This elaboration of a notion of indigenous modernity helps in reflection on the

⁸³ Message from the indigenous Guatemalan delegation to the fourth Congreso Justicia y Paz in *V Centenario*, p.102.

inherited evolutionist schemas of Western social thought by highlighting Amerindian survival and resurgence. Thinking about indigenous modernity in this way pointedly highlights a greatly neglected aspect of the Atlantic configuration: the revision of historical understanding that was given effect by the debates of the early 1990s is not only about the self-understanding of Western civilization but also the interface of civilizational imaginaries in the long confrontation of the Atlantic New World. '500 Years' provided a thematic vehicle for indigenous activists to re-plot historical events and a crisis-ridden present and to mark out potential futures. The theme is too important to leave behind. Indeed, it echoes in ongoing struggles for recognition and sovereignty throughout the Atlantic world and in the election of indigenous leaders to government posts in Bolivia, Ecuador and Venezuela. The Quincentenary ought not to be remembered only as an episode of revisionist soul-searching and multicultural controversy in the US, but as a breakthrough for the trans-national politics of the social that has augmented an animated indigenous modernity.

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