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Review of Edges of Global Justice: The World Social Forum and Its “Others” by Janet M. Conway

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**Edges of Global Justice: The World Social Forum and its
Others.**

**By
Janet Conway**

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Routledge

True to its title, *Edges of Global Justice*, in this path-breaking book, Janet Conway illuminates both the leading and the outer edges of the World Social Forum (WSF) as a global event and process of pursuing global justice. Aware of the methodological and epistemological limits of analyzing such a complex phenomenon, her methodology “walks forward questioning,” and her epistemology acknowledges “the limits of my own knowledge, its partial, positional, and situated character, and the therefore open-ended nature of my conclusions” (pg. 5). Informed by this self-delimiting approach, she conceptualizes the WSF as a global political and cultural project and interrogates, in a sympathetic yet critical manner, the theory and praxis of some major currents within the WSF: the new politics of open space, WSF as global civil society, the new politics of autonomist theorizations, and feminisms. Using a post-colonial, anti-racist, feminist and practice-based approach, her main argument is that the WSF is a product of the emancipatory traditions of Western modernity, a site of contention among those traditions as well as the site where subaltern presences demonstrate the limits of those traditions. Yet in the current conjuncture of Neoliberal capitalist expansion and neo-imperial, “anti-terrorism,” albeit problematic, the WSF might be one of the instances of hope for transformation of those traditions as well as of the movements that constitute it.

Engaging the vast literature that now exists on the WSF, and in which this book will now be a must-read, Conway begins by challenging the understanding of many commentators that the non-intelligibility of the project in process is desirable. She argues that this obscures the operations of power within it. Furthermore, in describing the genealogies of the WSF she reminds us to go beyond the anti-globalization protests in the Global North, to focus on the specific struggles in Brazil and Latin America as well as the Global South more generally and not to dismiss the contributions of the new social movements to this process. Similarly, she is critical of the WSF and its mostly male and “light-skinned” analysts for not recognizing that some of its defining practices are shaped

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Caribbean, and African feminisms are mentioned but not engaged systematically as they “did not leave written traces.” While it is important that she acknowledges that coloniality of knowledge and power shapes her book, and that other methods are needed to study the non-European ways in which the subaltern speak, it is not enough to continue privileging the privileged. The subaltern, uncritically singular, do not speak either at the WSF or in Conway’s book.

In noting this, I do not intend to diminish its rich contributions but only to echo her insight that to engage other worlds and epistemologies, we need other languages, and as long as we rely exclusively on the written, academic, and colonial languages we too see the subaltern only in their cultural and spectacular presence even as we critique it. Nonetheless, it is an admirable accomplishment and falls in the category of what Bevington and Dixon (2005) refer to as movement relevant theorizing, that will be read by activists as well as scholars and will hopefully inform their practices.

References

Bevington Douglas & Chris Dixon 2005. “Movement-relevant Theory: Rethinking Social Movement Scholarship and Activism.” *Social Movement Studies: Journal of Social, Cultural and Political Protest* 4:185-208.

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Manisha Desai an Associate Professor of Sociology and Women’s Studies at the University of Connecticut. Her research and teaching interests include Gender, Globalization, Transnational Feminism, Gender and Development, and Contemporary Indian Society. She has published over 30 articles and book chapters and 4 books. Her most recent publications include: **Gender, Family, and Law in a Globalizing Middle East and South Asia** (co-edited with Ken Cuno, 2010, Syracuse University Press); **Gender and the Politics of Possibilities: Rethinking Globalization** (2008, Rowman and Littlefield). She is currently writing a book tentatively titled: *We Want Development Not Destruction: The Gendered Cartography of Subaltern Struggles Against Neoliberal Development in Gujarat, India.*