

ICWA LETTERS

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SLS-13
THE AMERICAS

Susan Sterner is a Fellow of the Institute writing and photographing the lives and status of Brazilian women.

“Happy Birthday, Brazil”

April 27, 2000
Porto Seguro, Bahia, Brazil

Peter Bird Martin
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Dear Peter,

On Saturday, April 22nd, the 500th anniversary of the Portuguese arrival in Brazil, Bahian state military police fired rubber bullets and lobbed teargas into a gathering of nearly 3,000 Brazilian Indians, members of the *movimento negro* (black movement), and supporters as they began an eight-mile protest walk from the coastal Indian reserve of Coroa Vermelha south to Porto Seguro. During the course of the morning over 30 individuals were injured and 141 arrested. Morale broken by the unprovoked violence, participants were left scared and fighting among themselves. The government had effectively stopped protesters from disrupting the visit of Brazilian President Fernando Henrique Cardoso and Portuguese President Jorge Sampaio to the historic region where the Portuguese first landed, but had left the country shocked and bruised in the meantime.

That wasn't the first use of force that day. Earlier that morning as *movimento negro* members tried to join the Indians at their conference site, a



Bahian Military Police line the road as Indians are permitted to return to their campsite. All other march participants, sympathizers, residents and journalists were detained and kept outside the police line. Just after taking this image I was forcefully escorted to the other side of the police line where the police cavalry continued to keep groups divided from one another.

fight allegedly broke out between a member of the *Movimento Sem Terra* (MST, Landless Rural Workers Movement) and an Indian, prompting military-police intervention and escalating into chaos. Startled *movimento negro* members ran into the conference area for protection. Indian security workers were unable to calm the crowds (particularly with MP's pursuing them, too) and called the military police for help extracting all non-Indians from the area. Order was restored, but a few started asking how it was that Indian security workers were using MP radios? Who was on whose side, anyway?

It was a very sad day for Brazil. Someone in the government wanted very badly to stop any sort of popular protest from gaining visibility during the Presidential visit and the U.S.\$957-thousand-dollar celebration planned for that evening. When the teargas cleared and the Indians packed up their hammocks to go home, it was clear the problems had just begun.

To begin to unravel what happened that day, it helps to look at who a few of the players were and what they had to win or lose.

The government of Brazil, the state of Bahia and the city of Porto Seguro have poured 150 million *reais* over the last three years into improvements and

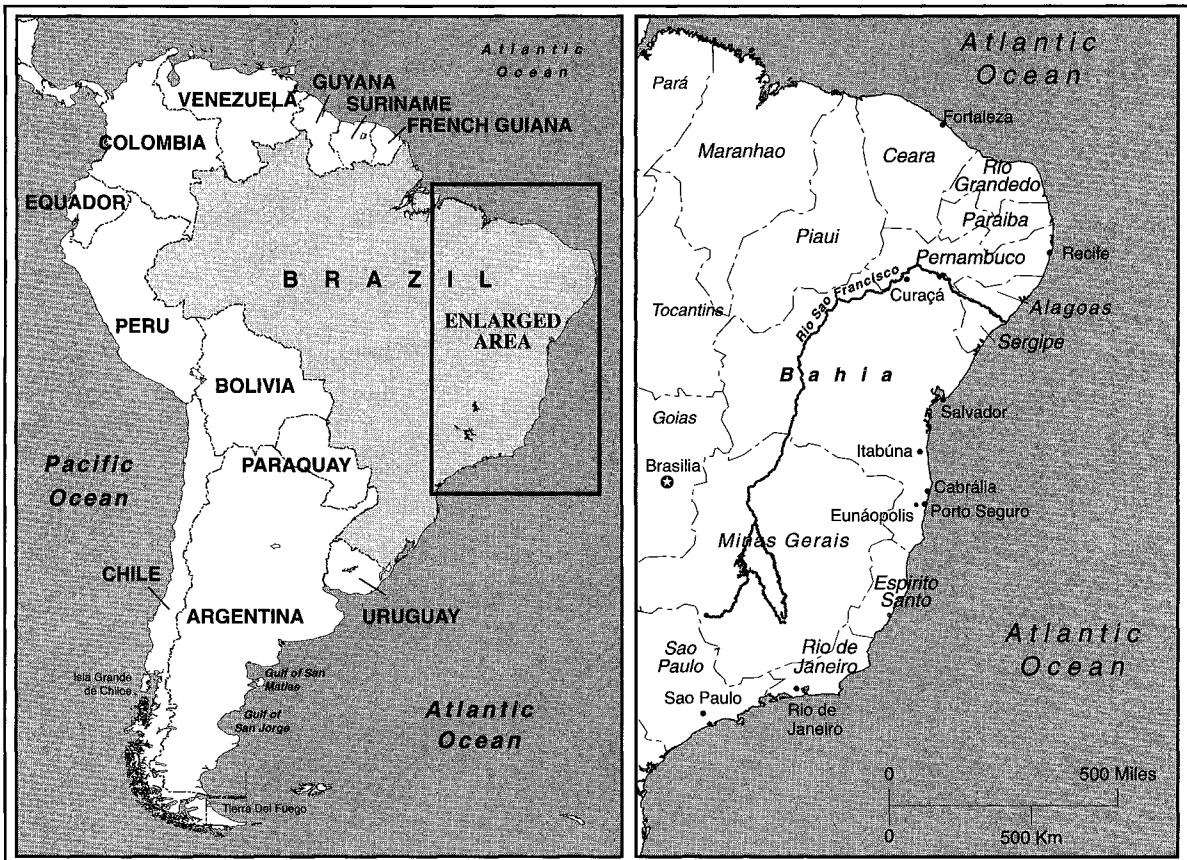
preparations for the 500-year anniversary.¹

The spending was spread across all types of works in Porto Seguro. Schools were upgraded, roads improved, sewers fortified and the public hospital modernized. Critics of the spending pointed to the fact that the majority of the expenditures were dedicated to areas tourists would see or use, and left the more needy neighborhoods in the lurch.

PRESIDENT FERNANDO HENRIQUE CARDOSO AND THE POWERFUL

The scheme for the day of the 22nd was to have the Presidents of Brazil and Portugal visit Coroa Vermelha where Pedro Álvares Cabral landed 500 years ago, tour "Cidade Alta," the historic village of Porto Seguro, by afternoon and cap the day with the nearly million-dollar production of, "O Dia em que Brasil Nasceu (The Day Brazil was Born)." The evening's extravaganza promised to be unforgettable with an orchestra, laser show and to-scale 16th-century model boats floating in the bay as a scenic backdrop. It was sure to be an elegant spectacle chronicling the founding of Brazil. Over four tons of fireworks were planned to close the show.

There was just one problem. The seats were avail-



¹ One real = U.S.\$0.55. The Brazilian government is expected to spend over 65 million *reais* on 500th-year related events over the next year. This amount includes 13 million to be spent for a special exhibit in Germany. The total amount is 11 times this year's budget for the *Funda o Nacional do Indio* (FUNAI) of 5.9 million. The budget of FUNAI, the federal agency set-up to work on behalf of the Indians (similar to the Bureau of Indian Affairs in the U.S.) last year was 2.6 million. (source: *A Tarde*, 1 May, 2000).

able only to President Fernando Henrique and 10,000 of his closest friends (or least-hostile allies). It was a VIP, invitation-only event closed to the public. The Brazilian public was slow to catch on to that one. My husband Tyrone and I learned, in trying to buy tickets or find schedules for commemorative events, that there would be only one event. And, we were not on Fernando Henrique's list.

Security was the main issue for the elite, and I use the word "elite" because that's who they were, and that's the word used by the public when venting their frustrations. Invitees were the likes of high-powered business leaders, ambassadors, national and local politicians and the wealthy players of the country. The production coordinators refused to release a list of those invited. The elite wanted to remain elite.

In on one broad stroke, Brazilian authorities perpetuated the notion of the 500 years since Brazil's "discovery" as having been to the benefit of only the "discoverers," and underscored the cynical notion that the Brazilian government works for the good of a select few. It was announced that on Saturday the entire area near the section of boardwalk where the mega-show would be presented would be shut down to all ambulant traffic. Stores, restaurants and street vendors would have to close down and clear the area — this on the Saturday of Easter weekend during the 500th anniversary on one of the biggest potential commerce days for the little city.

Tensions started picking up the week before the celebration when the *Movimento Sem Terra* announced that they would be marching on Porto Seguro during Easter week. The stated purpose of the MST march was twofold: to capitalize on the 500-year festivities to highlight demands for more expedient land reform; and to commemorate the 1996 massacre at Eldorado dos Carajás in Pará state of 19 MST members by military police (all of whom were exonerated under "self-defense" in the August 1999 trial). That, of course, went over like a lead brick. None of the higher-ups wanted their party spoiled by reminders of inherent social inequality, repressive police brutality or a sham justice system.

At this point a few other well-known characters came on stage: Antonio Carlos Magalhães of the *Partido da Frente Liberal* (PFL, or Liberal Front Party) or "ACM," as he's known; the state and national *Partido dos Trabalhadores* (PT); and General Alberto Cardoso, Minister of Institutional Security of the Presidency of the Republic. ACM is the current president of the national Senate. He's a strongman from the state of Bahia who's held every important elected position in the state at least once. His image is much like that of the late populist governor of Louisiana, Huey P. Long. The difference is that ACM has been around long enough to bully his good-old-boy politics to the national level.

Few things happen in Bahia without ACM's consent. Of the over 300 municipalities in the state, more than 250

are governed by PFL members under his influence. Most were, if not hand-picked by ACM, then not-so-subtly persuaded to align themselves with his party once elected to office. Such was the case with the mayor of Porto Seguro, Ubaldino Júnior. Elected three years ago, Júnior is the first PFL mayor of the city. During his administration many formerly neglected public works were miraculously funded and completed. ACM's Godfather-like touch is everywhere in Porto Seguro. His approach is to make visitors feel safe and to provide locals with enough services and pretty sections of town to make them feel attended-to and proud.

When the MST announced its plans to march on Porto Seguro, ACM was carefully out of the limelight over the issue, but was definitely gearing up his machinery. On Friday April 14th, seven buses carrying MST protesters toward Porto Seguro were detained in Itabuna, Bahia, for "security concerns." MST members reacted by blocking the entire highway and when the MP's tried to reopen the road they were met with stones. Ten MST and two students were arrested. Over the weekend ACM and Bahia Governor César Borges negotiated with Federal PT deputies Aloizio Mercante (São Paulo) and Jacques Wagner (Bahia). The result was a steep compromise on the part of the MST. They agreed to hold the memorial march for the victims of Eldorado do Carajás on Monday and then leave the Porto Seguro area. They were also prohibited from participating in the Indian conference and march on the 22nd. César Borges then commented through the media that all of the security and road-block measures being taken by Bahia military police were at the request of Brasília.

Things seemed to calm down a bit, though I doubt I was alone in not believing the MST would pack up and go home peacefully because politicians didn't want their party spoiled. That fear would be enough to bring together the PT, a leftist, reform-minded party, with the conservative populist party of ACM, the PFL. With elections approaching in October, the PT and PFL have been shyly courting each other and toying with the idea of joint platforms in some elections. (Politics do indeed make strange bedfellows.)

Indian actions weren't helping matters. Around the country Indians had been called to participate in the "Indigenous March 2000," an effort to focus attention on the negative impact of the European arrival in Brazil. The "march" involved caravans of indigenous groups heading to the capital of Brasília to demand legislative action and more money for Indian issues, and was to include a conference the week of April 17-21 in Coroa Vermelha and culminate in a march to Porto Seguro on April 22nd.

The day before the MST-PM confrontation in Itabuna, Indian representatives met with members of Congress in Brasília. In a passionate argument for the passage of legislation clarifying the rights of indigenous people in Brazil (*Estatuto das Sociedades Indígenas*), including the de-



Photo: Tyrone Turner

Indians await clearance from Bahia Military Police (MP) to return to their conference and campsite. The MP divided a march of Indians, black groups, land-reform activists and sympathizers into controllable groups, firing rubber bullets and tear gas at some.

marcation and return of Indian lands to Indian possession, *cacique* (Indian chief) Nailton Pataxó implored congressional action. The law had been stalled since 1991. Nailton also requested that ACM reverse land grants he signed during his second term as governor of Bahia (1978-1982) that had awarded Pataxó reserve land to 390 white ranchers. (Of the 54,000-hectare Pataxó reserve in southern Bahia, the Indians currently have possession of less than four percent.)²

During the meeting in congressional chambers, a Suruí Indian, Henrique Labaday, bare chest painted and wearing a traditional headdress, underscored the Indians' demands by waving a large wooden spear in ACM's face.³ The Senator jumped to his feet, wagged his finger and "requested respect." The Indian and his rude spear were whisked away. Just before the meeting, in a quixotic act of anti-"Discovery" rebellion, 500 Indians had stood outside the capital buildings and shot arrows at a huge clock counting down the days to the anniversary of the "discovery" of Brazil.

In the same few days it was decided that security

issues for Porto Seguro events would be turned over to the control of General Alberto Cardoso, head of Institutional Security. That action in itself said a lot about attitudes toward popular protests, and the threat government officials felt at the suggestion of a united protest drawing attention to sorely lacking social reforms.

THE INDIANS

The Indians had their own security concerns. While in Brasília they asked for Federal police troops to be sent to Porto Seguro to guarantee Indian safety during a planned April 22nd march to Porto Seguro. Nailton Pataxó confirmed that he had received death threats from Bahian military police. Nailton believed the threats were linked to last November's confrontation between Indians and Bahian MP's in which two policemen were shot and killed.⁴

On April 22, 1500, Portuguese nobleman-cum-explorer Pedro Álvares Cabral and his fleet of 13 ships and over 1,000 men landed on what was thought to be an island on the sea route to India, then the golden fleece of

² In 1982, Pataxó Indians began invading the lands that had been signed away from their possession by ACM and his predecessor, Roberto Santos. FUNAI entered a legal action against ACM and the State of Bahia. After 18 years the cases are still "undecided."

³ "Índios pedem a FHC a aprovação de Estatuto", "A Tarde" Friday, April 14, 2000 p.13

⁴ "Índios pedem segurança no protesto", Folha de São Paulo, Thursday, April 13, 2000, p.13

international commerce. The island turned out to be what was later popularly known as Brazil (after the Brazil-wood tree, which yielded a high-quality red dye prized in Europe) and populated by more than 5 million indigenous peoples of whom fewer than 300 thousand remain today.

Today the area surrounding the municipalities of Porto Seguro, and Cabralia to the north, is the homeland of the Pataxó Indians. The coastal area known as Coroa Vermelha (Red Crown) where Cabral actually landed 500 years ago, is a Pataxó reserve. In recent years, the Porto Seguro area has been the place where Brazil's "discovery" was celebrated each year on April 19-22, beginning with the Day of the Indian and concluding with a mass celebrated at Coroa Vermelha.

It is not possible to say that the Indian population of Brazil had anything to really celebrate this year. Over the last 500 years they have been pushed off their lands, enslaved, laid low by disease, co-opted as a means of control and excluded from basic advancements such as adequate schooling and health care. With this year calling more attention to the plight of the people "discovered" by the Portuguese, the Pataxó Indians in Coroa Vermelha hosted a national conference from April 17-21st. The Indians also planned a march to coincide with Fernando Henrique's visit to Coroa Vermelha and Porto Seguro. The idea behind holding the march at the end of the conference was to bring the Indians together to articulate and formalize their demands in a united voice and then march the eight miles to Porto Seguro as a means of giving urgency to their platform.

Throughout the week Tyrone and I visited the conference held on the reserve. Indians from 186 of the 215 known tribes in Brazil had assembled. Main meetings were held under a giant circus tent that rose out of the woods. Another tent and nearby Pataxó homes sheltered hundreds of the participants. The event was handled on what seemed to be a well-organized, shoestring budget with simple expenditures and huge common meals. In the mornings, general meetings were called to address issues common to all the Indian nations, to create solidarity and to set the day's agenda for the smaller workshop-like meetings. By afternoon Indians from different nations networked, napped or relaxed along the stunning beach.

The Indians' demands were straightforward. They were asking for the return of lands taken from them, definitive demarcation of their territories, better security and health care. They demanded an end to random violence and invasions by military police into their lands. Nearly every group included the need for better education, schools and the training of Indians as educators and social workers.

The atmosphere of the conference shifted from day to day as interaction and rhetoric outside the conference

acted upon its members. In Coroa Vermelha official celebration coordinators under the direction of Brazil's Minister of Sports and Tourism Rafael Greco had already renovated the memorial cobblestone plaza and replaced the old wooden cross with a newly erected, brushed-metal cross by Bahian sculptor Mário Cravo Neto. The Indians argued that the sculpture was erected on Indian land without Indian permission. The Pataxó thought it appropriate to erect their own parallel monument to the last 500 years of "Indian resistance" alongside of the plaza to be inaugurated on April 22nd.

On April 4th armed state military police, acting on the orders of Greco, razed the Indian sculpture and issued the menacing promise that any subsequent attempt to erect an "unofficial" structure on the site would be met with destruction and arrest. This event was just one of the many threads of tension that ran through the conference. Whispering and tight-lipped stares were given any time anyone inquired about where Crispin Calango, the Indian artist, was working on a replacement sculpture and when it would be ready.

The tearing down of the sculpture was another not-so-subtle reminder of just who would be in control of interpreting the history of Brazil, and who would be excluded — again. Rhetoric heated up when a newspaper from the south of the country reported, erroneously, that the Indians wanted to stop Fernando Henrique's visit to Coroa Vermelha and Porto Seguro. Rumor built on rumor, and by Friday before Palm Sunday, General Alberto Cardoso was reportedly advising the President to cancel his visit to the Bahian coast. Though General Cardoso's office denied, through the media, that he had advised Fernando Henrique to bail out of the celebration, the President's trip was drastically reduced from an elaborate, four-day stay in the area to a quick stop at the Coroa Vermelha site and a tour of the *Cidade Alta* (high city).

The Coroa Vermelha site was really quite pretty: a long, cobblestone walkway passing the simple homes of the Pataxó and ending at a circular plaza with the Cravo Neto cross in the center. The plaza was rimmed with lush green grass and coconut trees. Less than ten feet from the edge of the plaza the grass gave way to hot white sand and the beautiful surf. Oddly, two circular buildings, the Pataxó Museum and the Pataxó Commerce Center, were both closed the entire week, apparently to avoid drawing attention to the indigenous heritage of the area. It was also outrageously hard to get to and from the Coroa Vermelha area by public transport. Whereas during Carnival, the city bus service is beefed up along the coastal road to keep the tourists happy, it was as if the city had intentionally made it inconvenient for the those in Coroa Vermelha to get to town, and vice versa.

You may or may not be wondering how Indians who in many cases are living subsistence lives with poor education and healthcare can afford to put on a five-day conference and feed, house and transport the participants.



Photo: Tyrone Turner

A father and son stare at the cavalry line of the Bahia Military Police prohibiting them from re-joining other marchers.

Well I did. I asked and learned that the event was almost entirely funded by the Catholic Church-associated *Conselho Indigenista Missionário* (CIMI, Indigenous Missionary Council) which works to aid Indians in the advancement of land and human rights. CIMI's association with the conference and Indians proved to be a lightning rod for criticism and a point of division among the Indians themselves. CIMI representatives were easy to find during the conference and were often quoted as the authority on the Indians' desires and views. Most Indians agreed with the organization and appreciated the work of the individual CIMI priests in their communities, as well as on their behalf in Brasília.

Criticism of CIMI by government and police authorities as an organization manipulating the Indians in order to gain national fame notched up tension levels just a little more. Early Friday morning, a young Indian took the microphone and announced that he and all the other Amazonian Indians considered the conference tainted because CIMI was manipulating them. He was booed off the stage. Another young man took the microphone and defended CIMI as an organization that had the Indians' best interests at heart. Furthermore, the second speaker attacked the first as an "infiltrator" from the Federal government whose goal it was to keep the Indians divided.

The second guy was applauded and cheered. (In this particular exchange it was not mentioned that the state had tried to influence the Indians by offering the conference mattresses, portable toilets and 2,000 hot meals per day. The assistance was accepted. The Pataxó were also offered a van and an ambulance for their community. I do not know the outcome of the second offer.)

Some of the tension about CIMI's role came out of the planning of the march on Porto Seguro. I've already mentioned two entities that planned to march: the Indians and the MST. What I haven't mentioned is that the Indians were not so sure they wanted to march with the MST. One faction worried that the highly visible and controversial landless movement would usurp the day and dilute the Indian message. Still another group worried that the MST's reputation for violence and militancy would lead authorities to block the march.

CIMI supported the idea of a collective march to Porto Seguro as a means to call greater attention to the need for land reform and better protection of human rights. When I asked him about the division in Indian opinion, the CIMI President, Bishop Franco Masserdotti responded, "We (CIMI) are on the side of the excluded. We want to support the idea that the march of 500 years

should cause reflection about this anniversary and what has happened [in Brazil] over the last 500 years, and what kind of Brazil is being built."

MOVIMENTO NEGRO (BLACK MOVEMENT)

Still a third group planned to march. Led by the *movimento negro* (black movement — a collection of black activist groups) were the participants of "*Brasil, Outros 500*" (Brazil, the other 500) who planned a "Celebration of Resistance" march by uniting the MST, student groups, black-rights groups and the nearly 2,000 Indians at the conference in one giant march to Porto Seguro on the 22nd. "*Outros 500*" promised to load 50 busloads of protestors and send them from Salvador to Porto Seguro by Friday afternoon. The challenge would prove to be getting through police road blocks and a fear that the roads would be laced with "mikies", strips of nails laid by police to puncture tires.

On Friday, April 21st "*Outros 500*" held a giant press conference in order to give the media the opportunity to talk with various Indian, Black, MST, political-party and sympathetic organization leaders. The press squeeze was held about a mile off the main road in Coroa Vermelha in a dusty encampment of tents and buses. Present were the national leader of the PT, José Dirceu, CIMI President Dom Franco Masserdotti, Luis Alberto, a former Federal Deputy elected from Salvador, and other activist leaders. I did not expect to be able to find many MST leaders since they were being held at a police road check 60 kilometers away from Porto Seguro on the road from Salvador.

For Black leaders such as Luis Alberto, linking the "*Brasil, Outros 500*" march to that of the Indians' — making it one united statement — was important for Black-rights groups because they needed the positive visibility. The very concept of a black movement is still in its defining period in Brazil. As we talked, Alberto looked around the crowd and noted that there were no black Brazilian journalists covering the story of the march. This got him stirred up and he lamented that there was no alternative press, no clandestine radio stations to challenge the mainstream message of a press often complicit in the sins of the government. He leaned close to me and asked if I thought it sad that Brazil, a country built with the sweat of African slaves, today had no Afro-Brazilian ambassadors appointed to sub-Saharan Africa?

As PT leader José Dirceu's voice boomed out over a loudspeaker carrying the cliché message that real reform in Brazil, "would only happen through popular democratic revolution," Alberto said, "The left in Brazil thinks like a country of whites. The PT is just now beginning to talk about issues of race identity." He continued that it's safe to talk about the needs of women, children and Indians in Brazilian society, but stating that blacks were treated unequally flew in the face of Brazilian identity.

How can there be a fight for black rights if, as is so often said, Brazil is not a racist society? "People get shocked! They say that's not a problem in Brazil. [The idea that racism does not exist in Brazil] is a concept we have to fight on the [political] right as well as the left. We have to call our protest a march of 'Indians, Blacks and the Common Person' because we don't want the whites to feel threatened and excluded."

"*Outros 500*" leaders announced that the march would begin the next morning at 5, when they and the MST (assuming the MST had arrived) would walk down the road to join the Indians.

MOVIMENTO DOS TRABALHADORES RURAIS SEM TERRA (MST)

Where was the MST? True to form, the MST had decided not to leave the area as negotiated with the Governor and ACM, but rather to remain in the Porto Seguro area to participate in the march. Over 5,000 MST members had arrived in Eunápolis, a town 60 kilometers east of Porto Seguro, on the highway leading from Salvador. There, Military Police had set up multiple roadblocks and were entering and checking every bus, truck, car, taxi, etc., for MST participants and paraphernalia such as tents, signs, banners, farm tools, etc.

The MST was in action throughout the country during the two weeks leading up to April 22nd. The national organizers had promised 500 invasions of *fazendas* to commemorate 500 years of repression. In the north of Bahia five *fazendas* near the town of Curaçá were targeted for invasion in one day. In western São Paulo state four *fazendas* were invaded and the owners had taken up arms and banded together to defend themselves from further invasions. In Belém, MST and church organizers were planning a huge protest in memory of the Eldorado do Carajás massacre mentioned above. In the city of Salvador, over four hundred MST had invaded the building of *Instituto Nacional de Colonização e Reforma Agrária* (INCRA) and refused to leave until Raul Jungmann, Minister of Agrarian Development, promised to meet with MST leaders about the slow pace of land redistribution, violence in rural areas and access to development money. In short, the MST was on the move and its threats were being taken seriously.

Well before the bulk of the controversy started, the MST had negotiated with event organizers and military police officers to camp in Eunápolis. A huge MP camp was also erected nearby (foreshadowing?). Perhaps what the MST had not counted on was how easily the MP's would be able to control MST movement from that point into Porto Seguro. As tensions rose, police control increased and the mobility of MST decreased. This restrictive police action fueled the fire and by Friday afternoon, when the seven buses were detained in Itabúna, tempers were hot. It was reported that MST leaders said they would march on Porto Seguro "at any cost."

As a response, more police arrived and more roadblocks went up.

THE BRAZILIAN MEDIA

It was interesting to be on the ground watching events unfolding, and then read and watch newspaper and television coverage. It seemed to me that the media were there to cover a conflict before it happened. (But then the government was also repressing something before it happened.) Sadly, and perhaps unwittingly, the media fed the ill will by focusing on incidents and statements that fanned the fires. For example, on April 22nd, the morning papers hit the stands with images of MST members breaking rocks, allegedly to throw at police troops. One article concluded with a menacing quote from a self-described but unnamed “student punk activist” saying that protesters would take to the streets with Molotov cocktails. Very little coverage was given the issues addressed at the Indian conference. Things escalated all week to the point that the right to march became the story for the media, the battle cry of the various protesting groups and the security concern of the government.

Layered on top of all of this was the fact that the 500-year anniversary fell during Easter week. A quarter million Brazilian and foreign tourists were expected to flock to Porto Seguro to bask in the sun at twice the normal holiday price and participate in big parties they were sure to happen — and which they learned upon arrival, wouldn't.

THE MARCH AND THE VIOLENCE

Friday-night negotiations between PT leader José Dirceu and government staff member Marcelo Cordeiro ended without a solution. The government wanted the march contained to the Coroa Vermelha area and the protesters, in particular CIMI, wanted the march to go all the way to Porto Seguro without compromise or interference. Dirceu was unable to get the protestors to agree to anything less.

On Saturday morning Tyrone and I rose before dawn and took a cab from our bed-and-breakfast to Coroa Vermelha for the appointed 5am start of the march to Porto Seguro. Everything was still quiet. At the gates to the Indian conference we were able to see that people were just beginning to awaken, get in line for breakfast and get organized for the day. Rain was on the way, and we ducked under a nearby bus shelter and waited.

The same two traffic cops who had been coordinating the comings and going at the conference arrived and joked with the Indians and ladies selling hot coffee. After a while Indians began leaving the conference with bedrolls and suitcases. I stopped a few ladies and learned that the march had been delayed until mid-day, but buses needed to be loaded up. We walked in the direction of Porto Seguro in search of breakfast and to kill time be-

fore the march, which, we assumed, based on past experience, would be delayed again.

Walking down the road, we were passed by empty buses heading in the opposite direction with small signs in the windshields saying they were reserved by the military police. Where were the soldiers? Had they been dropped off ahead of us on the road to Porto Seguro? Or were the buses going to pick them up? I noticed there had been almost no traffic passing, not even city buses, and assumed the MP's had closed off the road through Coroa Vermelha in case the MST decided to arrive from another direction.

I learned later that I was in fact more correct than I had imagined. At dawn military-police troops had moved into the streets of Eunápolis, guns drawn, in a sweep of force meant to keep the MST in their place. The road leading to Porto Seguro, through both Eunápolis and Coroa Vermelha, was shut down to traffic not bearing credentialed approval of General Cardoso. In response, the MST had turned two buses perpendicular to the highway and blocked the BR101. All traffic, of protestors and tourists alike, was paralyzed for most of the day.

It happened suddenly. Marchers organized earlier than we had expected and began moving down the road toward Porto Seguro. At the time Tyrone and I were still unaware of an earlier clash between military police and a lone MST agitator (considered a police plant by most) and the tension among the Indians when police chased other protestors into the Indian conference area.

Police on foot, in buses and on horseback surrounded the protesters as they moved down the road. Suddenly the police divided the protesters into smaller groups and fired on them with rubber bullets and tear gas. Video coverage of the group divided behind us showed a panicked crowd of Indians, *movimento negro*, other supporters and protesters running into the surrounding woods.

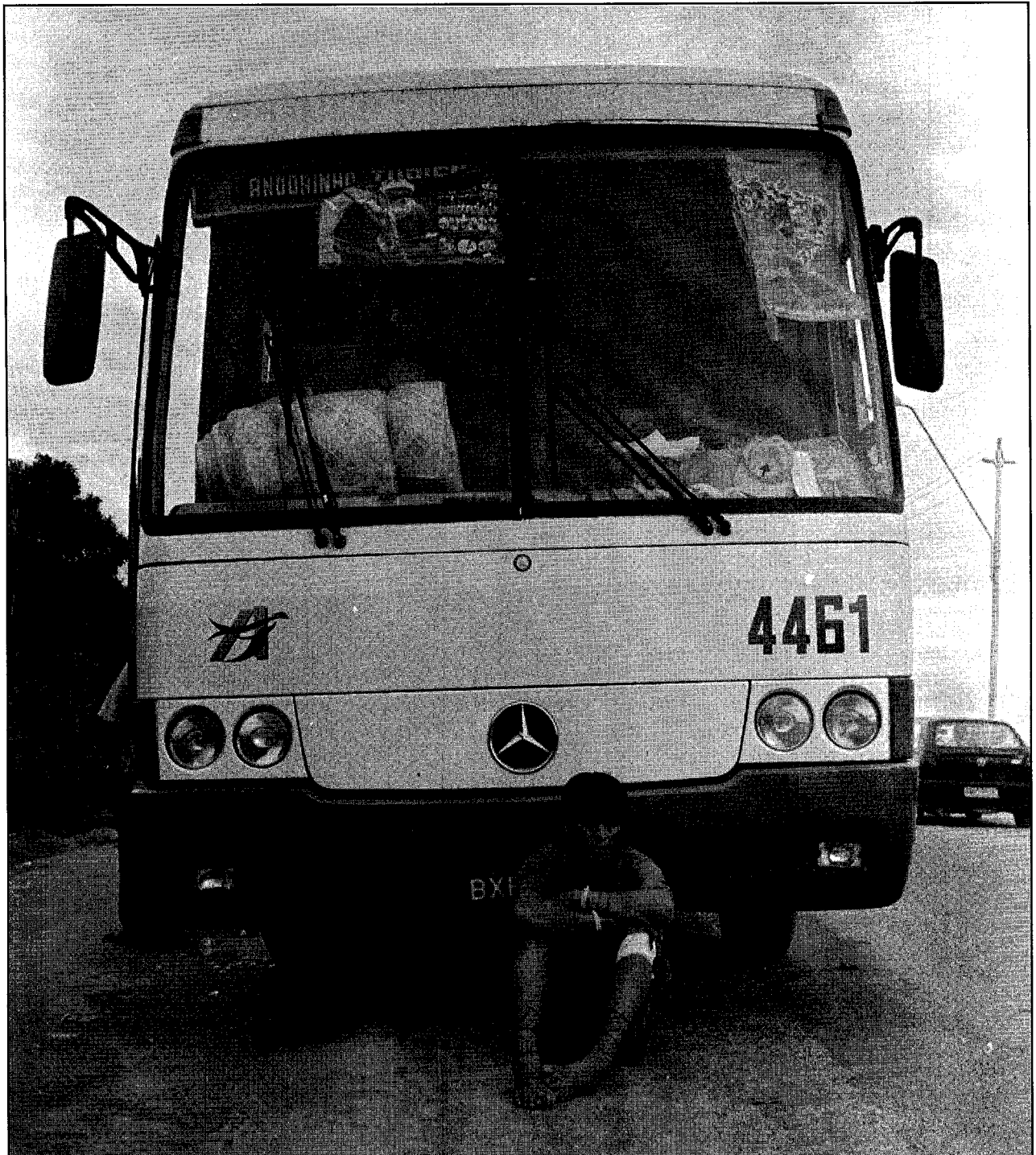
When troops finally opened the line for us to pass we found a group of angry Indians arguing with Bahia military police colonel Wellington Müller, the man responsible for the violence. The military-police cavalry was lined up behind him and no one was permitted to join the other protesters held behind the line of horses and columns of foot soldiers.

Emotions were raw. Captain Müller threatened to arrest, on the spot, anyone that pointed a camera at him. Journalists were intentionally separated and held away from protesters. All of the soldiers were without name tags. Müller raised his hands and in an almost-bored tone, declared himself a friend of the Pataxó, but against all others who were there to “take advantage of the Indian.” It was a nice try on spinning the media, but no one was buying it — particularly not the Vice-Mayor of Porto Seguro, Aziz Ramos (PSB, Socialist Party of Brazil), who

was walking around with a stunned look on his face and a souvenir teargas canister in his hand. He had been walking with the Indians to show solidarity when the MP's opened fire. Someone suggested he call a judge to deal with the behavior of Captain Müller and open the roads. He responded, "It would be better to call the entire MST than any judge," alluding

to the prevailing government attitude of repression.

A small-framed black woman walked up to the cavalry line and yelled at the mostly black and mulatto soldiers: "You're being used! This is just like South Africa. The government is using black soldiers to keep black people down! Wake up, please!" A friend led the shak-



Gildo Terena, 18, wounded and depressed, waits for other Indians to load up and return home after what was to have been a peaceful march calling attention to the irony of the omission of Indians from official 500th-year celebration. The march turned ugly when Bahia Military Police fired rubber bullets at the protestors.

ing woman away. The faces of the soldiers were unmoved. Captain Müller was by then not so calmly screaming at the growing crowd of angry sympathizers and hounding press encircling him.

After an hour Captain Müller allowed only the Indians to cross the police line and walk back toward the conference site. Gradually it became clear that hundreds of people were hiding in the woods, too afraid to come out. One of the black leaders began moving through the crowd telling everyone that any idea of restarting the march would be unsafe and for each person to remain with a buddy as protection against police action. More troops arrived and surrounded the area. The crowd backed away from Captain Müller and quieted down. Müller disappeared into the shelter of the troops and trucks. A few minutes later the order was given to open the road to all traffic — a sign that the police felt the threat was over.

The rain slowed to a sprinkle as protesters moved back toward Coroa Vermelha. I walked behind a group of young Indian teens moving quietly and sadly through the crowd. A truckload of beach-starved tourists, speakers blasting, rolled by cheering and obviously oblivious to what they were passing. The boys looked up at the revelers and shook their head in disgust.

At the Pataxó community health center where the injured were being attended, and again at the conference site, the air was filled with sadness, anger and confusion. Gildo Terena, 18, described his reaction to the police. When the smoke and bullets started he tried to talk with the soldiers and asked them to stop hurting fellow human beings, "'We are not animals,' I said to them. I asked them to stop the violence. I knelt before them and said we have women, children and pregnant woman walking with us. They stopped in front of me. They thought I was going to leave. I asked one man why he was doing this and he said, 'because there are people who ordered us to do this.'" Gildo saw that another soldier was wearing headphones, "He was listening to music and having fun [in the midst of this]. It made me angry and I ripped his headphones from his head. That's when they knocked me to the ground again."

At the conference site the gates were barred to all journalists and non-Indians, including CIMI. A group of the Indians was saying that CIMI's hard-line insistence on joining the Indian march to the other marches and going all the way to Porto Seguro had brought on the wrath of the military police. Others pointed to the fact that the same Indians criticizing Cimi were the ones suspected of being informants for the police. The Indians had been divided, conquered and broken.

Meanwhile 30 CIMI members and missionaries were being held in a Coroa Vermelha hotel by Colonel Müller's

troops. He refused to release the detainees even after Cabralia judge Ailton Pinheiro ordered their release and threatened Müller with arrest. Müller's response, "I want to see who's going to arrest me in the middle of my troops."⁵ (The missionaries were eventually released.)

Said *cacique* Melquíedes Macoxi of Roraima, "This was how Brasil was founded: threats, massacres and the running of blood. Brazil wasn't discovered. Brazil already existed! The celebration should have been about the indigenous people. Instead, this has been the anniversary of the running of blood, our blood. This is how they celebrate, by injuring others."

Cacique Nailton Pataxó appeared at the gate with his bedroll and bag under his arm. He stopped to put into words the sad lesson to be learned from the day, "We can not stop bullets with our hands. We have to leave here alive [in order to] return to win."

On his heels came another *cacique*, Ailson Truca from the São Francisco River Valley of Pernambuco, "I don't sell out to Fernando Henrique! I don't sell out to anyone! I refuse to remain here knowing another Indian has sold me!" He stormed off toward an awaiting bus, others from his tribe following behind. Another crowd surrounded Zeca Pataxó, the Indian security guard who allegedly called military-police forces into the Indian conference area earlier that morning and was also overheard updating MP's on Indian movements. He denied everything.

Zeca might have gotten off the hook if a local public prosecutor had not arrived at that very minute and asked Zeca if he had called the military police and told them to hold 141 black protesters because the Indians were armed and would kill them. Zeca claimed he had only asked for police assistance when he thought the Indian artist Crispin Calango was being pursued by *movimento negro* and MST members earlier that morning. There was a quiet moment as the meaning of Zeca's response sunk in. The prosecutor left to negotiate the release of the 141 detainees.

CIMI priest Dom Luciano, on hearing Zeca speak against CIMI responded, "[The government] didn't want this to happen. An eight-mile march, even a peaceful one, of landless, ethnic groups [and] Indians — that's too much for them, too strong a statement to allow. They had to break it up before it happened. And we needed to think that they were capable of anything; even buying a *cacique*."

I walked around watching and listening. It was one of the saddest public moments I've ever experienced. I had seen a people broken and demoralized. The same group of Indians that had been fervently arguing out their destinies with each other, brainstorming point-sheets of demands and generating a collective voice,

⁵ I "A Tarde" Tuesday, April 25, 2000, p.7



Photo: Tyrone Turner

Trucá Indian chief, Ailson Trucá of the São Francisco river valley in Pernambuco, left, leads others from the conference site after exclaiming indignation at Indian complicity with military police violence. The day after the violence Ailson lead his community in an act of defiance by knocking down power-line towers on Indian territory and refusing access to repair crews — cutting electricity to a huge part of the river valley.

were now splintered and going home wounded, disillusioned, angry with the government and with each other.

Meanwhile, the President had canceled the official visit to Coroa Vermelha and was passing the afternoon in Cidade Alta with Portuguese President Sampaio and the accompanying press corps. The presidents signed a trade agreement and planted a brasilwood tree together to mark the great day in the history of the two countries. They skipped the laser extravaganza and flew to São Paulo for other 500-year celebrations.

That evening on the news, most channels led with video coverage of the day's events in Coroa Vermelha, but then buried the main coverage deep in the newscast. The event, however, was not to be dismissed easily. Over the following week the fallout was quick, and touched nearly everyone involved.

Perhaps least scathed by the events was the President. He seems to be artfully dodging personal responsibility or involvement with the events of the 22nd. Though he did state publicly that he was "tired

of the MST," he also said he thought public protest was an important part of a democratic society.

There's been no Al Haig standing up and saying "I'm in charge" on this one. Those involved on the government's side have all been quick to support the actions of the military police, but their words have been laced with bitter irony. ACM was quoted in the newspaper *A Folha de São Paulo*, as saying: "The Bahian military police acted with deliberation and with complete calm in order to avoid a larger conflict, which would be demoralizing for Brazil because it would involve government figures, President Fernando Henrique Cardoso and the president of Portugal... The truth is that the military police avoided a massacre. [The protesters] wanted to impede the commemorations of the 500 years."⁶

As for Colonel Müller, he insists that the police action was appropriate, "If there had been any sort of excess we would have registered fatalities and hundreds of injuries. We did everything in accord with the Constitution, which gives us the right to act in a preventive and repressive form to guarantee our sovereignty."⁷ He said

⁶ "Comissão da Câmara debate ação, "A Folha de São Paulo", 25 April 2000, p.6

⁷ "Coronel critica entidades", "A Folha de São Paulo", 25 April 2000, p.6

this, but when an officer of the court appeared to serve papers summoning him to give a deposition, the Colonel hid in his house.

In the days following the thwarted protest, investigations, lawsuits and dismissals have been flying around. Three prosecutors of the state of Bahia will direct an inquiry into the use of violence and the, "closing, for nearly 24 hours, of the city of Porto Seguro." The congressional commission on human rights will also open an investigation of the actions of the military police and Colonel Müller for his responsibility in conducting the police that day.

The day after the incident, FUNAI president Carlos Frederico Marés announced that he would resign to protest the treatment of the Indians. Before he could turn in his resignation, Minister of Justice José Gregori sacked Marés for disloyalty to the president. Also fired was the Minister of Sports and Tourism, Rafael Greco, who had been in charge of planning the 500th-year festivities. (His dismissal has been announced as an opportunity for the PFL, the party of ACM, to gain another cabinet position.)

For its part CIMI announced that it would sue the Bahian military police and Colonel Müller for abuse of authority and violation of human rights. CIMI is also creating a document for all Brazilian bishops to sign demanding an investigation into police actions, and will denounce President Cardoso to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights. CIMI also tried, unsuccessfully, to get the Brazilian Catholic Church to cancel an April 26, mass in Coroa Vermelha commemorating the first mass said on Brazilian territory.

The mass happened, but not as planned. The Church had declared that the mass would not be used to make any comment on the violence of April 22nd. However, shortly after the mass began a group of over 40 Pataxó Indians, joined together by a long black cloth, forced their way through security and walked onto the altar, which had been built directly over the site of the destroyed Pataxó monument (history repeating itself?). The Indians pointedly turned the black cloth toward visiting Vatican Secretary of State Angelo Sodano. A young

Pataxó, Jerry Adriani Santos de Jesus, walked up the microphone and eloquently spoke against the treatment of the Indians over the last 500 years. The Indians, their message broadcast live around the nation, then left the stage quietly and the mass resumed.

Unfortunately, just as the black leaders had predicted, after Sunday night none of the news coverage even mentioned the participation of black activists, or their arrests. Once again they were absorbed into the invisible majority.

The public seems to have had two general reactions: either complete ignorance of the events of April 22nd, or absolute embarrassment and shame over the behavior of the country's politicians and treatment of the Indians. Wherever we go any mention of Porto Seguro earns us an earful of public opinion. Even Luciana Danneman, my bank representative, could not resist passing judgement, "Fernando Henrique is just another president eating lunch in five-star hotels while the country burns."

So Brazil celebrated 500 years of existence as "Brazil" by turning its back on the people and giving itself a black eye. To the world it may seem like a brief stumble, an aberration in behavior by one of the world's largest democracies. The wounds from the sudden violence of the April 22nd 500-year commemorations, the deep cuts and bruises, will appear to heal as the evening news programs exhaust the topic, newspaper coverage shifts the story to inside pages, and the public moves on. But for the Brazilian indigenous, black-rights and landless movements the healing will be superficial. The police repression is a reminder that Brazil is a young democracy and still relatively untested and afraid of giving real voice to its people. Under the tender new skin will fester hurt, resentment, anger, betrayal and steeled determination. It's a guarantee of future violence.

Peace,



Susan L. Sterner