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Beyond Speaking Truth to Power:

Anthropological entanglements with multicultural and indigenous rights politics¹

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Abstract

Professional anthropologists conspicuously disagree about the kind of practical engagement we should have with multi-culturalist and indigenous rights politics. Disagreement is not simply about whether academics should act as advocates for the specific interests of their research subjects but about the desirability of this type of politics in itself. Although the latter is often presented as a matter of academic conscience, where, for example, strategic essentialisms prove more politically effective than our preferred scholarly accounts, other actors inevitably see it as political. That the professional 'we' often excludes anthropologists not based in North America or Western Europe further complicates the issues. I argue that retreat to the study to compose analyses that 'speak truth to power' is quite ineffectual in a world in which forces we wish to denounce have themselves become skilled players of multiculturalist politics. For all its difficulties, more active engagement in the messy realities of concrete situations is the only way forward. That entails the rejection of some of the intellectual trends that have dominated the discipline in the past two decades and the kind of re-evaluation of our professional role that has to date been sidestepped in efforts to contain ethical and political controversy.

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Introduction

If we reflect on the historical failures of the social projects of the Left that captured the imagination of so many intellectuals in the creative arts as well as the academy during the twentieth century, it seems difficult to deny that a lack of pluralism was one of the rocks on which such projects foundered. Even the Nicaraguan Sandinistas, despite their conscientious efforts to be self-reflexive about the “errors” of the past, did too little too late to address the Miskitu problem, along with other regionally based forms of disaffection that strengthened the hand of their imperial opponent and its local allies (Hale, 1994). This reflects the way the “actually existing socialisms” belonged to a broader stream of modernist thinking in which the State was the key not simply to inducing “economic modernization” but the transformation of consciousness and culture necessary to produce the new men and women required by a revolutionized social order. Through education and the exercise of moral and intellectual leadership, the agents of the State who already understood the necessary shape of the future would construct the kind of men and women who might ultimately, but not yet, become subjects worthy of exercising power in their own right.

The problem with this model was, of course, that it rested on over-optimistic assumptions about what modernist forms of power and sovereignty could actually achieve on the ground when confronted with the recalcitrant material of real human beings embedded in particular and diverse regional forms of life that abounded in specific kinds of contradictions between heterogeneous actors. State agents could sometimes intervene in such local contradictions quite “productively” from the point of view of strengthening the overall hegemony of national political centres. National educational institutions,

along with the emerging mass media that contributed significantly to nation-building projects, had far from negligible effects. Yet as has now been comprehensively demonstrated by the Latin American literature that has focused on “decentering the regime” and analyzing processes of national state formation “from below”, even the comparatively successful hegemony created in Mexico after the 1910 Revolution remained a thing of shreds and patches (Joseph and Nugent (eds.) 1994, Rubin 1996).

Over its seventy year history, the Mexican post-revolutionary State and the ruling party that incarnated the regime infiltrated deeply into the social life of most regions, yet it never eliminated counter-movements. Some of these counter-movements might be described as “anti-state”, but more were concerned with the way the State should intervene in their lives and the kind of State that they deemed desirable. The State could often reach mutually acceptable accommodations in particular cases,² and such accommodations had a significant impact on how State power was actually exercised locally, as well as in some cases reflecting substantial shifts in ideology, as was the case when the longstanding policy of seeking to “Mexicanize” and assimilate indigenous people began to be rolled back in the 1970s. But its failure to deliver substantially on the social justice promised by the Revolution implied the continual re-emergence of non-trivial forms dissidence, that is dissidence that challenged the way resources were distributed, the way power was allocated and governance effected, and the ideological premises around which the State had sought to build consensus.

² In the case of some indigenous regions, such as the Tojolabal and Las Cañadas zones of southern Chiapas (Leyva Solano and Ascencio Franco 1996, van der Haar 2004), the State exercised very little influence over how local people adapted its institutional forms to their own purposes, and although there are many other cases in which State impositions were more profound, there was generally some scope for locals to adapt official organizational forms to their own purposes, even if these were, as in the case of the community of San Juan Chamula in the Central Highlands of Chiapas, the purposes of boss rule by an oligarchy.

Anthropologists have made a significant contribution to this rethinking of state-centred analyses and, indeed, to rethinking how the State itself should be conceptualized, as a translocal institution that can only be “known” in a partial form through the experience of interaction with specific State agents in particular settings in which multiple fields of power intersect, with those related directly to the State apparatus only one element in what are often more complex scenarios. The State is always under construction from below as well as from above, as people construct imaginaries of the actually existing forms of power and of desired alternative forms of governance, their actions reflecting the balance between desire and conjunctural judgements about practical possibilities (Gupta 1995, Nuijten 2004), a balance that generally has to be negotiated under conditions of disagreement that may lead to conflict. Exploration of this basic messiness is at the heart of the ethnographic project, though it generally needs to be complemented by an understanding of how local conflicts may be exploited tactically and strategically by non-local actors. Among the issues that we routinely need to consider is whether apparent ideological cleavages and the formal political banners under which contending forces group are a close reflection of the real sources and nature of divisions. Asking these kinds of questions effectively evidently demands a minimal degree of “critical distance” from the contending parties.

Yet the fundamental shifts in the role of national states consequent on globalization and the proliferation of neoliberal rule systems now present anthropologists with some new dilemmas. Providing that we retain a purchase on the messiness of ethnographic realities, we can be suitably dismissive of the more romanticizing tendencies that characterized the search of Northern intellectuals for new bearers of projects of emancipation to replace the working classes in other forms of subaltern identities, along with

the excess of “resistance” that analysts of poststructuralist bent found in the widest possible variety of social behaviours (Abu-Lughod 1990, Brown 1996, Ortner 1996). Indeed, one of the potential fruits of such scepticism about simplistic dichotomies between “resistance” and “domination” is the prospect of gaining a better understanding of how “working people” in their diversity think and act in ways that do still express desires for social and political transformation (Gutmann 2002). But our problem as a discipline is our far from residual position in the “savage slot” and general expertise on “otherness”. As Micaela di Leonardo (1998) has trenchantly demonstrated, this has conditioned the way the anthropology of North America has developed in the era of liberal multiculturalism in far from desirable ways, while the issue on which I will focus here, the rise of multiculturalist projects and an indigenous politics of recognition in the “other” Americas, provokes no less serious problems. Their roots are clearly not simply intellectual, since multicultural policies create jobs for the “experts” emerging from postgraduate programmes that are now producing far more highly qualified people than the academy can absorb in the South as well as the North. Yet this situation has further intellectual as well as political consequences, to the extent, for example, that the proliferation of professionalized intermediaries in both the State and NGO sectors contributes to the reinforcement of group boundaries and visions of “cultural distinctiveness” with which at least some academic anthropologists feel uncomfortable.

These are not, however, problems that are unique to those working outside universities, since academic anthropologists may also work as consultants, and now face strong challenges to do research that is “useful” to someone, from both the State (in the name of “society”) and many of the people that they seek to study. Ethnography is perhaps always in danger of cultivating tunnel vision, given the personal sympathies and commitments that tend to

be forged in fieldwork, but the power of anthropologists to determine what research is done and how it is done is increasingly circumscribed in more politicized contexts. This is hardly a bad thing in the light of the many ethical issues of both informed consent and “scientific” representation that were not resolved to the satisfaction of all parties by the American Anthropological Association Task Force’s investigation of the Neal-Chagnon affair,³ although it would be disingenuous to suggest that any ethical code of practice or any attempt by the subjects of research to assert their “ownership” of the research process could completely eliminate opportunities for manipulation or even duplicity on the part of a researcher, and especially a foreign researcher who would probably not have to live with the longer term consequences.

Yet even if basic field research is carried out according to the ideals of “shared” or collaborative anthropology, we are still faced with broader issues about the social and political implications of any kind of “commitment” to the “interests” of the “group” that our analysis is inevitably constructing for a wider public domain. What I aim to show in this paper is that these problems have been exacerbated by the fact that specific types of “pluralism” have now become integral to the redefined state projects of the neoliberal era, and are, in a closely integrated way, also frequently integral to the strategies of political and economic forces that have far from “progressive” social agendas. We need to ask both how far greater “pluralism” relates to both conscious tactics of “fragmentation” of popular movements and also how far “fragmentation” is a bottom-up response to changing socio-economic conditions that need to remain at the centre of our analyses. If our aspiration is to make a contribution to transcending the fragmentation of the diverse social forces that share a desire to improve those conditions, I suggest that we will find some

³ See <http://www.aaanet.org/edtf/index.htm> for the Final Report of the Task Force.

approaches to theory and practice in our field more relevant than others in this respect.

To make the discussion more concrete, I am going to draw on a variety of situations of which I have some personal ethnographic knowledge in Mexico and Brazil. But to introduce the indigenous rights theme and highlight ways in which it seems problematic, I want to begin with some recent debates between other anthropologists working in and outside Latin America, not least because the contributions of the former are often largely ignored in debates within the Northern academy.

Indigenous rights: An inescapable essentialism?

The politics of Indigenous Rights have always provoked mixed reactions amongst anthropologists. Many an indigenous land claim that has enjoyed the support of a professional anthropologist as expert witness in court has also had to face the counter-testimony of another witness of the same profession. These differences have sometimes been a matter of who is paying the piper but perhaps more frequently they have been a matter of personal conviction or ideology.

In today's debates for and against the role of the anthropologist as an advocate for indigenous rights, it is all too easy to forget that in a country such as Mexico, the rather significant institutional and political weight of the discipline nationally owes its origins to the fact that Mexican anthropologists played a central, albeit not entirely unambiguous, role in post-revolutionary State projects designed to assimilate minorities into dominant national (*mestizo*) cultures under construction. Yet that project was abandoned not so much due to the defection of a new generation of anthropologists from the "official" indigenist perspective (Warman et al 1970), but as a consequence of

the dogged refusal of many indigenous people to be assimilated, the revolution's failure to deliver on its promises of "material improvements", and last but not least, an unintended consequence of the extension of public education, namely, the creation of a new generation of bilingual schoolteachers of indigenous origin who saw the celebration of their "difference" and projects to conserve and rescue "cultural traditions" as a way of competing successfully for hegemony in local political fields hitherto dominated by representatives of *mestizo* minorities.

In making this move, they were aided by global developments that changed the conditions under which indigenous rights politics could be practiced from the 1980s onwards. Indigenous movements have learned to exploit the addition of a "post-colonial sensibility" to the human rights discourse within Northern Countries, the alternative development discourse that prospered in the wake of the ecological and social disasters provoked by World Bank mega-projects, and above all, the explosion of transnational NGO activity. As Developmentalist State projects collapsed in Latin America, and their already limited redistributive and social welfare achievements were "rolled back" by structural adjustment and the implantation of neoliberalism, playing "the identity card" increasingly became one of the few remaining means available to make material demands on the restructured State.

African and Asian governments have refused to ratify ILO Convention 169 on Indigenous and Tribal Peoples, which advocates self-determination for indigenous minorities in decisions about "development", along with land restitution. Yet the Convention has been ratified by an interesting range of neoliberal states in Latin America, including those of Guatemala, Peru and Mexico. Although indigenous activists have been disappointed by the practical results to date, it remains significant that a country such as Mexico

has modified its constitution to redefine the nation as a “pluricultural entity” given the country’s strong past commitment to “Mexicanizing the Indian” by eliminating indigenous identities and forms of life entirely.

Yet at the moment when things seem to be looking up for people looking for a modicum of compensation for an often savage history of discrimination and dispossession, anthropologists have become increasingly worried about supporting them. In 2003 we saw Adam Kuper question “the justice and good sense” of pretty well any concession to a local indigenous people’s movement in the pages of *Current Anthropology* (Kuper 2003: 395) and also, without the critical responses from colleagues, in a more popular version published in the *New Humanist*. For Kuper, indigenous claims to land involve the deployment of essentialist or racist criteria that mimic the most destructive European nationalist ideologies based on ties of blood and territory. Indigenous movements find support amongst ingenuous Northern do-gooders by exploiting romantic images of the primitive that modern anthropology must repudiate. Worse than that, Kuper contends, almost certainly with Southern African experience in mind, though the problem is far from irrelevant to regions of Latin America where indigenous people are competing for control of land with relatively poor *mestizos*, successful indigenous land claims are likely to produce serious ethnic conflicts that it is the duty of a responsible analyst to highlight. What makes Kuper’s intervention particularly interesting is its strong rejection of the entire politics of indigenous rights and apparent endorsement not simply of a universalistic, individualistic liberal framework for rights politics, but also, as Alcida Ramos points out in criticising him, an unusually unreconstructed notion of “development” (Ramos 2003: 397).

Yet many of Kuper’s worries about dominant representations of indigenous people are widely shared even by anthropologists who are sympathetic to

their cause. A good example is the Mexican anthropologist Gabriela Vargas, writing in the American Anthropological Association's *Anthropology News* (Vargas Cetina 2003). With a PhD from McGill and research experience in Chiapas, Vargas has had a practical ethnographic engagement with organized indigenous groups of a kind that draws her to the conclusion that their struggles should be supported. Yet she finds that the most politically influential representations of indigenous people are misrepresentations or falsehoods in Kuper's sense, albeit practically effective "strategic essentialisms" in Spivak's (1988) sense, thus leading anthropologists to some difficult choices about how we can meet our professional and ethical obligations, especially when we are asked to validate "false" models, or perhaps most consequentially, to support one local faction over another.

However, as Les Field points out in a commentary on Vargas's piece in a later issue of *AN* (Field 2003), the debate about the role of strategic essentialisms in both academic circles (and the indigenous movement itself in the United States and Canada) is now twenty-years old. We should now perhaps have reached the point of transcending an unreflective opposition between a professional collective "we" and an equally homogenous and external "them" of indigenous movement activists and members. Firstly, Field points out, indigenous intellectuals themselves now routinely deploy anthropological tools of research for community ends. Secondly, and more consequentially:

The so-called "anthropological community" invoked at the AAA and other national and international meetings could be seen as a kind of false consciousness that obscures the deep cleavages among anthropologists concerning power and its deployments in indigenous communities. (Field 2003: 6)

In the light of that, it seems useful to return to Ramos's response to Kuper. Arguing that the kinds of blanket generalizations that Kuper makes about

indigenous movements are unsustainable as generalizations, she concludes that “what we need is serious anthropological research, rather than casual generalizations, and open-minded anthropologists who neither adopt indigenous causes as an article of faith nor reject ethnic struggles as racist manipulations by unscrupulous opportunists” (Ramos 2003: 398). It would be difficult to accuse Ramos of harbouring essentialist and romantic ideas about the primitive, given that her biting critical accounts of “indigenism” in Brazil have highlighted the vast gap that exists between the real lives, aspirations, behaviour and histories of displacement and reconstitution of the country’s surviving indigenous people, on the one hand, and their symbolic roles in both colonial European and latter day NGO fantasies of “otherness”, not to mention the significance of what is a comparatively tiny minority⁴ in the construction of Brazilian national identity, on the other.⁵ Nor is it particularly easy to depict what are often life and death struggles between Indians and non-Indians in Brazil as the product of a misplaced policy of State tutelary “protection” within a modernizing project (Lima 1995, Diacon 2004) converted into indigenous rights politics thanks to the interventions of Northern do-gooders. Not only do legacies of genocidal projects of exploitation, prejudice and the official “infantilization” of the Indian weigh heavily on contemporary circumstances, but “ethnic” conflicts are fuelled by Brazil’s class structure. If the violence perpetrated on Indians by poor *mestiços* has sometimes been deliberately orchestrated by the military, large landowners and the owners of the capitalist extractive industries, it is also fuelled by the brutal realism of the struggle to transcend poverty in a hostile

⁴ Brazil’s 350,000 Indians constitute 1% of the contemporary national population. Indigenous people are also a minority, at just over 12%, in Mexico, but, with an absolute number exceeding 13 million, constitute the largest single national indigenous population in Latin America.

⁵ See, for example, the collection of seminal essays published in English in Ramos 1998.

environment. These are some of the issues anthropological research perhaps needs to address in more depth, if it is to deserve the adjective “serious”.

At one level, this could be seen as simply a repeat of the call for anthropologists to focus on the “messiness” of concrete local situations (which would include an eye for manipulation where that was relevant), but indigenous rights politics have clearly raised fundamental questions about the authority of anthropological knowledge. This was made starkly evident by the reception of David Stoll’s attack on the factual veracity of the account that the Guatemalan indigenous activist and Nobel laureate Rigoberta Menchú Tum gave to anthropologist Elizabeth Burgos (wife of Régis Debray) in her famous testimonio *Yo me llamo Rigoberta Menchú y así me nació la conciencia* (Stoll 1999, Arias (ed.) 2001).

Solidarity and objectivism: the limits of “representation”

Writing in the name of “objectivity” against both the postmodernist turn in anthropology and the supposed naivety of the Cultural Studies movement in the United States, Stoll in effect “disqualified” a subaltern voice at the same time as he promoted a reading of the supposed “facts” of recent Guatemalan history that justified his own belief in the futility of armed insurrection. This gives his work at least an elective affinity with the “prose of counter-insurgency” but the precise political purpose underlying his work has remained unclear. As a genuine liberal, Stoll wished to avoid absolving the Guatemalan military from their widely documented responsibility for the majority of the acts of violence committed in the period, but his intervention was bound to provide the Guatemalan Right with new ammunition in their contemporary struggles with Rigoberta Menchú, now a major international as well as national political figure. Furthermore, even if one concedes the validity of at least part of Stoll’s analysis of the situation in the Ixil Triangle of

Guatemala, the fact that he sought to extend it to the Zapatista rebellion in Chiapas offered poor support for his claim that objectivism should be the overriding goal of anthropological research, since his interpretation revealed a striking failure to avail himself of the by then plentiful ethnographic and historical literature on what was, in fact, a very different situation.

Commenting on Menchú's testimonio from the perspective of participation in the Latin American Cultural Studies movement that is one of Stoll's principle targets of critique, John Beverley has pointed out that Menchú's purpose in constructing her story for Burgos was "not to have it become part of 'Western Culture', which in any case she distrusts deeply, so that it can become an object for us, a means of getting the whole truth — 'toda la realidad' — of her people" (Beverley 1999: 82). This is not a subaltern cultural practice "signifying its subalternity to us" but an artefact that seeks to be an agent of a transformative historical project that aspires to become hegemonic in its own right". Menchú sought to advance the interests of those she "represented", and the way she did that was inevitably conditioned at the time by her militancy in a guerrilla movement seeking to incorporate indigenous peasants into a broader class-based movement. Yet as Beverley goes on to argue, the fact that it should not be simply "*our* desires and purposes" as anthropologists or literary critics that "count in relation to testimonio" does not necessarily have to simply redraw the simple "us" versus "them" kind of boundary that troubled Field, or at any rate, offers us possibilities for thinking about different places in which such boundaries might be drawn:

But we — the we of "*our* desires and purposes" above — are not exactly in the position of the dominant in the dominant/subaltern binary. While we serve the ruling class, we are not (necessarily) part of it. To leave things simply at the celebration of difference and alterity, therefore is to leave things in the space of a

liberal multiculturalism. It is to replace politics with a deconstructive ethos. Part of the appeal of I, Rigoberta Menchú that David Stoll objects to resides in the fact that it both symbolizes and enacts concretely a relation of active solidarity between ourselves — as members of the professional middle class and practitioners of the human sciences — and subaltern social subjects (Beverley 1999: 83).

Yet taking Beverley's injunction to recognize the inevitability of politics, the question remains "with whom should we actively solidarize?" where there are differences of "desires and purpose" among "subaltern social subjects" themselves?

This is a problem that Menchú's text itself poses for us. It constructs both a vision of "difference" — reinforced by her famous assertion that no one, not even the anthropologists, can ever get to "know all our secrets" — and a vision of her own conversion to an understanding that class alliance across ethnic boundaries was a condition for the survival of "Maya"⁶ identity and culture that does not shirk from giving very strong insights into why indigenous people might hate the *ladino* "other". If we read it as a political text, locating it within the broader field of Guatemalan politics in its day, we can obviously relocate it in time amongst a series of alternative, evolving and contested expressions of indigenous political projects. Some of these are strongly essentialising and some are not, some are overtly critical of professional anthropological projects, domestic and foreign, while others seek to enlist the participation of professional academics for a variety of purposes, ranging from studies of the history of cultural forms to campaigns over land tenure and access to social development resources. The key issue is thus for whom we think we are producing knowledge. In divided communities and

⁶ Maya identity is a political construct that has become increasingly important in Guatemala since the violence but still does not necessarily correspond closely to "lived identities" (see, for example, Warren 1998). The same argument can be made equally strongly for Chiapas.

conditions which pit subaltern against subaltern, solidarity seems to be a purely political choice. Are there any principles that could guide us in making or refusing such choices other than personal inclination?

I think the answer is yes, and my answer will ultimately appeal to a possibility of rigorous or, if you will, “scientific” analysis in anthropology that might seem in danger of resonating with the posture of David Stoll, though I hope to make it clear that my argument is quite differently grounded from his. Let me begin, however, by focusing on more immediate questions of political engagement in ethnographic contexts.

Facing up to uncomfortable conversations as an ethico-political imperative

The first point to be made is that solidarizing with people, by recognizing their desires, aspirations and sensibilities as worthy of respect, does not necessarily entail accepting their point of view as beyond debate. Kuper is not wrong, for example, in claiming that identity politics *sometimes* incorporate racist assumptions that reflect the internalization of ideas imported by dominant groups.

Ideas of biologically determined natures brought into the region by *criollo* elites intent on “whitening” it, if necessary by genocide, have left a strong legacy within the Nahua community⁷ I recently studied in a relatively forgotten backwater of Michoacán state in Mexico. Not only do indigenous people use the term “race” to distinguish themselves from the descendents of the not tremendously affluent *mestizos* who began to invade their communal

⁷ “Community” here refers to an officially recognized agrarian unit and a local conception of unqualified sovereignty over a given territory sanctified by both historical rights of possession and the sharing of a common set of religious traditions that delineate a unique group: the “community” is therefore made up of multiple settlements and the term is both a juridical and an “emic” one (in the latter sense resonating with the Nahua notion of an *altepetl*).

territories at the end of the 19th century, extinguishing several of the colonial indigenous communities entirely and displacing their populations, they also express equally historically rooted antagonisms between their own communities through the notion that they were formed by people of different origins and races, i.e. in completely essentialized terms. It is a relatively straightforward matter to show that, even if the idea of racial difference were acceptable, an hypothesis of separate collective origins is nonsensical historically, given that post-colonial processes totally reorganized pre-Hispanic settlement patterns and mixed together groups of people speaking diverse languages. It is also possible to produce evidence that attitudes to non-indigenous neighbours were different before the later nineteenth century. These are matters in which it is possible to have a dialogue and on which it seems politically necessary to try to force a dialogue for a number of reasons.

In this case, we are dealing with communities that have a remarkable history of defending their autonomy and control of resources, and which remain combative. Yet if, as Roseberry (1994: 361) argued, “what hegemony constructs ... is not a shared ideology but a common material and meaningful framework for living through, talking about, and acting on social orders characterized by domination”, the internalization of frameworks of meaning derived from the ideas of dominant groups is its potentially disempowering and fragmenting side. Since the Nahuas are a minority within a minority in terms of the politics of indigenous rights in Michoacán, where only 3.5% of the total population now professes an indigenous identity, divisions that limit their collective solidarity are particularly unwelcome. Secondly, however historically understandable it may be, the indigenous communities’ antagonism to *mestizo* neighbours, who now share common problems of stark poverty due to environmental degradation and neoliberal economics that leave them few alternatives to international migration, is a tremendous

resource for the regional elites that dominate both populations and have proved historically adept at manipulating their mutual distrust.

As the Zapatistas in Chiapas have shown, it is quite possible to imagine a non-exclusionary, bridge-building politics that asserts indigenous identity and autonomy claims whilst at the same time challenging the boundary between Indian and *mestizo* whose construction was at least in part a conscious strategy on the part of elites in the first place. This is not a matter of returning to the traditional claim that class issues should override the politics of identity, though it is in a sense a reassertion of the significance of class. It is a question of challenging forms of identity-based politics that are compatible with leaving the vessel empty as far as any serious assault on chronic poverty is concerned. There have, furthermore, been a series of recent incidents in other parts of Mexico of indigenous communities mobilizing under arms to resolve longstanding grievances by evicting *mestizo* beneficiaries of agrarian reform from their lands: whilst the boot has more unusually been on the other foot, in at least some of these cases, it is difficult to see the indigenous communities as the victims of injustice.

The idea of academic research becoming part of a conversation or “dialogue” between outsiders and insiders is, of course, liberal, rationalistic and not a little naïve. Firstly, there may be quite practical problems. Where indigenous communities jealously guard their autonomy in decision-making, they may simply not allow ethnographers access to communal assemblies where issues are debated and decisions reached.⁸ This principally affects what the

⁸ I have always been rather lucky with regard to the kind of access that I have been granted myself, though being permitted to witness factional conflicts and hear people debating very delicate issues and speaking without necessarily remembering that an outsider is listening poses ethical problems to which self-censorship is sometimes the only acceptable solution.

ethnographer can know and understand, since even if admitted to observe the workings of such a forum, it would not generally be appropriate for an outsider to “participate” (beyond, perhaps, providing some potentially useful information, as distinct from a direct opinion, if asked to do so). Yet the assembly is, generally, the forum in which “the community” realises itself as a broad and inclusive body adopting positions and reaching a consensus. In practice, opinions may be forged through backstage processes in which representatives of different factions strive to garner the support of individuals, and public processes of consensus building may themselves be subject to a degree of manipulation. In the words of historian Florencia Mallon (1995), outcomes reflect the process of constructing “communal hegemony”. Thus, as a non-participant observer, the mute anthropologist cannot conduct any kind of “dialogue” in what remains the most transparent, inclusive, public space of debate, but of necessity must resort to other kinds of conversations, with leaders and/or ordinary members of the community. Although there are various tactics that one can adopt to make such conversations relatively open and public, there is a constant danger that they will be seen as belonging to the backstage forms of hegemony-building that frequently invoke suspicion and censure, especially where the issues are already entangled in internal political conflicts.

Secondly, there is the problem raised by Stoll’s intervention. Dialogue implies listening and respecting the point of view of one’s interlocutor, allowing for the possibility of irreconcilable differences. Since anthropologists often fail to understand things correctly – or at the very least, only succeed in gaining a partial understanding, which must be taken as the norm, given that most of us would probably accept that our fields move on and that there is a cumulative collective gain in both empirical and theoretical work – we need to take the dialogic character of dialogue seriously. We also need to accept

that our “interests” cannot be exactly the same as those inhabiting a life world that may be connected to and penetrated by ours but nevertheless remains very different. Contrary to the stereotypes that frequently guide the thinking of the leaderships of “popular” movements dedicated to consciousness raising and transformation, I see little ethnographic evidence that people living in conditions of extreme abjection are incapable of taking a longer-term and broader view of the world, even if a hand-to-mouth existence does promote a tendency towards pragmatism and acceptance of short-term “fixes”. But since no amount of “empathy” at an intellectual level can replicate the lived experiences of discrimination, humiliation and suffering that so many of the people we study have experienced (in what are often far more complicated lives than our own), rationalist or instrumentalist arguments will not always win the day. The heart will always have its reasons that reason cannot know, to paraphrase Pascal, and those reasons are generally rooted in history.

But anthropologists should have some assets to contribute in talking to their subjects about political choices and strategies. Firstly, we have the privilege of distance and the luxury of observation in a comparative frame. We should not only, in principle, be able to understand the micro-politics of local situations but also be able to see how they fit into a larger picture. Though we are unlikely to be completely impartial, “honest brokers”, we should at least be able to understand the mentalities and motivations of contending parties, at least in most situations.⁹ Talking to the actors about these issues may, in fact,

⁹ This is my basic objection to the position adopted by Scheper-Hughes (1995) in her call for a “militant anthropology”, despite my profound admiration for her current campaigning work on organ trafficking and for both the passion and the insights of *Death Without Weeping*. Not only are few situations readily reducible to the black-and-white terms that enable us to make a simple determination of which group should become the focus of our unqualified commitment, but we need to do our utmost to understand the points of view of all the actors

be quite useful for them, in the sense that an outsider dedicating him/herself to canvassing a broad range of opinion on a daily basis may be able to shed light on why certain tactics failed that would not so readily be produced by those who advocated them in the first place, even if they practice a good deal of self-reflection. Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, actors operating in a particular locality may not have a detailed knowledge of related situations elsewhere. Despite a brief visit by Zapatista activists, Chiapas might as well have been located on a different planet as far as the Nahuas of the Michoacán coast were concerned, and even their more intensive interaction with the P'urhépecha indigenous communities in the state's central highlands, the fulcrum of the indigenous movement in their state, had not equipped them with a very deep understanding of what was a fundamentally distinct agrarian and political situation or of the varied political colours of the organizations that the *compañeros p'urhépechas* had built up over recent decades (Zárate Hernández 1994).

The “knowledge broker” role of anthropologists can be of substantive practical value, as Fox (2000) has observed in transmitting a suggestion by an indigenous leader in Oaxaca state that his organization might be able to negotiate more effectively with the World Bank if it actually knew the details of its changing policies and procedures, so frequently misrepresented by

involved in complex scenarios, including those we may find repugnant, be they “paramilitaries” killing human rights workers and indigenous rights activists or the elites that we might hold responsible both for economic misery and intellectual authorship of repression. What ethnographic and/or historical research usually shows us is that elites are far from homogeneous or even particularly smart (an important issue for understanding why popular movements sometimes advance), whilst paramilitary groups are often not too different in their social composition from their victims, forcing us to ask more searching questions about the circumstances that account for the emergence of such groups and the motivations of those who join them (which may be quite distinct from the motivations of those who gain from their actions at a safe distance). Even a single type of “movement” or organization can, of course, embody a variety of ambiguous and contradictory qualities, as Starn has shown in his analysis of the Peruvian *rondas campesinas*, for example (Starn 1999).

agents of the official intermediary, the Mexican government. But my main point here is that anthropological knowledge, or perhaps better, to reduce the stamp of authority of the term, anthropological analysis, can itself be useful, providing we are willing to run the risk of disclosing our thoughts and disseminating them in locally accessible forms, acknowledging that they are relevant to debates about political strategy.

Yet the implication of this argument is that it is not, in the last analysis, simply our “local knowledge” that counts, in two senses. Firstly, what local people cannot so readily obtain for themselves is a bigger picture. This may seem an odd thing to say in an era when, in the case of Mexico and Central America at least, many people from tiny rural places habitually cross international borders to live in the world’s most “advanced” urban spaces, and global electronic media have enhanced the imaginations of us all. But what undocumented migrants navigating public spaces apprehensive about surveillance in between long hours of work actually experience of a radically distinct form of life remains limited in fundamental ways, and the same must be said of the information imparted by electronic media, however catalytic it may prove in reshaping popular desires and understandings of global power relations. Anthropology does have something distinct to offer if we are willing to rethink our mission in terms of the way someone like John Beverley understands “solidarity”. Yet this raises the second and more fundamental issue.

Beyond the ethnographic context, beyond representation

I began this paper by accepting the potential virtues of a more plural world, but have, I hope, consistently turned away from the proposition that anthropology’s mission should be purely representational, and purely representational for a Northern “us”, a position which lends itself to the

celebration of a polyphony (if not cacophony) of voices and a horror of the grand social projects embodied in capitalist, populist and socialist developmental states and the ideologies which underwrote their social engineering endeavours. Thus far I have tended to present the political articulation of anthropologists at the level of the ethnographic interface with our subjects, but anthropology should not be reduced to ethnography, especially when it tries to enter the political field. If we are to make serious pronouncements about indigenous and multiculturalist politics we need to ground those pronouncements in some kind of broader understanding of historical possibility, of the kind that Eric Wolf (1999, 2001) advocated in his discussion of “structural power”. A concept that sought to integrate the classical concerns of Marxism with some of the insights of poststructuralist theory, notably Foucault’s account of “governmentality”, structural power offers a framework for discussing (and explaining) why some historical outcomes become more possible than others (without trapping us in a rigid determinism).

Wolf also argued that efforts to develop and deploy concepts that lend themselves to comparative analysis and explanatory goals – what we might describe as a “scientific” procedure in the humanities – remains a preferable option for anthropology to settling for “interpretation” and “experience-near” writing that is simply representational (Wolf 2001: 386). In relation to the present discussion, I would argue that the kind of position that we adopt on indigenous rights issues, for example, should be guided by at least some engagement with the question of what indigenous “autonomy” could be expected to achieve for its beneficiaries under contemporary global conditions. Asking that kind of question takes us straight into the territory that Wolf charted out in insisting on the need for the kind of “bigger picture” provided by the concept of structural power.

Let us assume for the sake of argument (as actually seems to be the case in Latin America, thanks in part to the recent support of the World Bank for communal titling exercises under certain circumstances despite its overall efforts to promote individualized landed property systems globally) that it becomes easier rather than harder for indigenous groups to establish control over territories, administer them in ways of their own choosing, run local political and justice systems according to their own “uses and customs” and reproduce their cultural practices and languages. Although there are certainly contexts where such a project would be opposed by either capitalist interests and/or non-indigenous groups living interspersed with indigenous people, in the absence of such conditions, the contemporary neoliberal State is likely to see such a development principally as an opportunity to promote cultural and eco-tourism, turning an opportunity to demonstrate its willingness to acknowledge global post-colonial sensibilities and offer redress for an un-pluralistic past into a livelihood project that will be consistent with the neoliberal prescription that the poor be helped to help themselves by marketing something – in this case their “patrimony”.

One problem is, of course, that some people have more marketable patrimonies than others. Such schemes for rural redevelopment now tend to be seen as alternatives to supporting small farmers working in a grossly inequitable global agro-food system, and only a minority of them are likely to provide sufficient livelihoods to stem temporary or permanent out-migration. Indeed, the fact that extensive migration has already occurred raises further issues.

It is more likely today than fifty years ago that indigenous people who leave rural areas for the cities will retain their indigenous identities, and whilst they

are likely to be socially transformed in various ways that may complicate continuing interactions with their homeland, it is even possible that they will try to participate in indigenous political movements (as evidenced by some small traders in Mexico City, for example). But what does indigenous autonomy seen as the re-creation or defence of a rural territory mean for these urban people, for people who have found work in sweatshops, offshore textile and assembly plants (as is often the case in Guatemala), or in distant zones of capitalist agriculture? What does it mean for people working in construction, as jobbing plumbers or domestic servants in California? What does it mean for remaining rural residents who have become increasingly dependent on migrant remissions?

I suggest that it means an anchor for identity that is empowering under contemporary conditions, but may not be directly relevant to solving the problems posed by the place of many of the putative members of the community in national and transnational class structures. The leaders of indigenous movements have also become urban-based to a large extent, since they work within NGO networks and need direct access to the parts of the state apparatus relevant to their goals. There is, at the very least, a danger of their becoming increasingly “out of touch” and set into the kinds of agendas that produce funding and official approval. At least one anthropologist, Charles Hale, is currently working with indigenous leaderships in Guatemala to facilitate debate around the implications of global economic changes for movement strategies and the pitfalls of their becoming increasingly “disarticulated” from their social bases. Yet we should also note the paradox that an indigenous Mexican whose ancestors migrated to a city after being dispossessed of their communal land through a (possibly illegal, and even if legal, fundamentally “unfair”) manipulation of the pre-revolutionary liberal reform laws has no hope of securing restitution under the conditions that

govern the contemporary politics of recognition. In so far as contemporary policies are not addressing the broader social and economic consequences of the neoliberal decade, they are maintaining ambiguous feelings about “Indians” as people who deserve sympathy and respect at one level, but are not simply “different” but may even be overcompensated for their unhappy past by a State that ignores the needs of the majority of its citizens.

The question of the kind of economic project that can be tied to the politics of indigenous autonomy is thus far from trivial. Despite the loss of a considerable amount of support and the division of even some of the communities in the rebellion’s heartland into pro and anti Zapatista factions, ten years after the rebellion of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation, the movement is still building its autonomy project in Chiapas. Yet its ability to do so reflects the unusual level of external economic support the movement receives from abroad, and its capacity to act as gate-keeper to the remaining NGOs that operate in the zones under EZLN control. This is such an exceptional case that it can hardly serve as a general model, and it is difficult to argue that even the Zapatistas have “solved” the problems of providing rising standards of living for their adherents in the long term.

What the Zapatistas tried but failed to do was to build a “rainbow coalition” of social movements at home and abroad that could challenge the entire neoliberal economic model and transform the State through popular action from below without bidding to capture State power as such. Although their ideological influence on the wider indigenous movement and contribution to the anti-globalization movement has been immense, their concrete project for people remains locked up in their small part of the larger regional space that forms the object of transnational capital’s Plan Puebla-Panama (Villafuerte 2001). If the Zapatista political project makes any sense at all ten years down

the line,¹⁰ it needs to renew its initial concern with how to create a viable alternative economic order that is also something that others can see both as a politically feasible goal and as relevant to their own, often very different, social circumstances, aspirations and desires.

To a very great extent, that alternative economic order must be appropriate for a largely urbanized society in countries such as Mexico and Brazil, even if a broader vision could and should embrace discussion of possible ways of transforming urban-rural relations and restructuring life and livelihoods in rural places. In practice, a dichotomous view of the urban and rural is no longer analytically appropriate to understanding the livelihood strategies of people who retain at least a foothold in rural places, but the urban-rural divide remains material enough in other senses, both culturally (often in the form of negative attitudes towards those who remain “country folk”) and practically (in terms of access to services, education, and the “knowledge-based economy”).

The exceptionally acute problems of the Brazilian “mega-city”, a function of a development model that reinforced an already strong concentration of population in a small number of large coastal cities by undermining the economic bases of smaller urban places even in the “backlands” relatively close to the coastal areas in the old colonial heartlands of the North-East, have favoured the growth of a movement explicitly orientated to agrarian reform

¹⁰ Some Mexican anthropologists who once displayed a relatively uncritical attachment to the EZLN now seem to have gone to the opposite extreme of berating the movement at every turn. Although this is an understandable reaction if we assume that their original position reflected the hope that the EZLN rebellion would serve as the vehicle for the emancipation of all of us, this seems to me to be an unduly negative position to take on a movement that has been genuinely innovative in its political style and approach to cultural politics, establishing a legacy that will continue to make an important contribution building new kinds of popular political cultures and movements in the future.

and a social re-evaluation of small farmers, the *Sem Terra* movement (MST). Although there are innumerable contradictions in the MST project, not least in terms of its dependence on resources channelled through the State to ensure the viability of its new agrarian colonies (which could be seen as a replica of earlier state-sponsored rural colonization and modernization projects in some ways), it is a project that has attracted some people to abandon the cities for the countryside again. Given the social heterogeneity of its base, and the very nature of a project that seeks to create a new kind of social order based on a radical revision of dominant ideas about rural ways of life, the MST is quite distinct from identity-based movements, though it arguably embodies a “cultural project” of its own in a broader sense. Indeed, this is one of those “cultural projects” that might be seen as an alternative to the kind of citizenship projects embodied in State hegemonic strategies, though it is clearly one in which a reformed and revitalized State is a necessary element. Furthermore, the MST is willing to deal with the State as it is, as distinct from the Zapatista approach to “autonomy” as refusal of all dealings in the medium term with a corrupt and corrupting State machine, a posture not replicated by many of the other regional indigenous movements in Mexico that subscribe to the Zapatista position as defined by the San Andrés Agreements between the Chiapas rebels and government of 1996, still not honoured by the government side.

It would seem highly desirable to try to think about indigenous and Black people’s projects in Latin America in terms of these wider issues and other kinds of projects, rather than think of them, somewhat anachronistically in sociological terms, as being about what happens with regard to control of resources and political and juridical organization in isolated rural spaces. Some rural social movements themselves have begun to think in these broader terms, as they seek to weave transnational alliances with other

movements that share their militancy but mobilize very different kinds of people (Gledhill 2004). Private farmers losing their land to banks have begun to think about what they might have in common with groups that they previously feared, detested and despised, such as indigenous people and land invaders. Such alliances may be shallow and fragile, as the EZLN's efforts to make common-cause with the El Barzón debtors' movement in Mexico demonstrated, but globalization has fostered the conditions necessary for leaderships to think through the immediate problems of those that they represent in much broader terms, terms which invoke a clear questioning of the shape of contemporary capitalist development and global power relations.

Structural power, governmentality and "resistance"

Anthropological perspectives should surely mirror this new thinking in breadth, but they cannot easily mirror the kinds of utopian positions that have inspired intellectuals in other disciplines to see endless grounds for hope in the flip-side of capitalist globalization. We know too much ethnographically about the difficulties of sustaining cross-class and inter-ethnic coalitions and about the way neoliberal techniques of rule are proving relatively successful at maintaining a high degree of fragmentation amongst the social forces demanding alternative development models.

Consider, for example, an analysis that Willem Assies (1999) has provided of the much lauded progressive social movements of the Brazilian city of Recife, governed by the Workers' Party and a pace-setter in such developments as participatory city budgeting. Assies offers a number of useful correctives to widely held misconceptions about the roots of Brazil's "new politics" in the spontaneity of the grassroots social movements that emerged under military rule, noting that the role of the Catholic Church and other "institutional" actors should not be underestimated and that middle class professionals

played a significant role in the social construction of the movements. Politicized under the peculiar circumstances of the transition from military to democratic rule, with the consolidation of democratic governance these professionals have found themselves in a changed relationship with the popular “base” which, as Assies puts it, offers a good illustration of how once “radical” demands for “participation” and “empowerment” “blend into a strategy of neoliberal reform” as they acquire “connotations of self-advancement and self-reliance to participate as economic subjects” (Assies 1999: 223). I have already mentioned the problems posed for indigenous movements by the “disarticulation” of leaderships from local social realities and their incorporation into wider party political and NGO circuits that have their own ideas about appropriate agendas for multiculturalist politics and the politics of recognition. But these problems are now magnified by the neoliberal premises that underlie the thinking of even the electable “Left” in countries like Brazil and Mexico.

There are still alternatives in the region, notably the much berated “populism” of Hugo Chávez in Venezuela, which has proved far more politically resilient than most commentators expected, despite its limited delivery of economic improvements, because of its uncompromising attitude to all sectors of the country’s elite and its clear commitment to the empowerment of people of colour whatever the reaction of the white middle classes. But truly significant mass mobilizations in Ecuador and Bolivia, involving a plurality of “popular actors” frontally confronting the neoliberal model, have yet to produce a real “regime change”, whilst Peru seems to have reached an impasse in which the almost negligible popularity ratings of its current President, Alejandro Toledo, have created as much nostalgia for the authoritarian style of his disgraced and exiled predecessor, Alberto Fujimori, as provided openings for more “progressive” social movements.

Anthropologists often get excited by the small local victories that social movements sometimes score against “globalization”, often in the name of defending cultural patrimony. It is slightly ironic that successful mobilizations against the location of a Costco superstore and a golf course in the Mexican state of Morelos have taken place in areas already transformed by heavy suburbanization (as demonstrated by density of garden centres) and which draw a good deal of their income from “culturally sensitive” tourism, whilst the folk whose grandfathers fought with Emiliano Zapata in the impoverished south of the state remain busy migrating to cope with the impacts of the decline of a sugar industry, thanks to the poor terms offered to Mexican peasant producers under the NAFTA, the subsequent refusal of the US government even to honour the agreements it did make in the original treaty negotiations as far as sugar is concerned, and the unwillingness of neoliberal governments to even think about the rather numerous alternative uses of sugar cane that some of their own technical experts strive to draw to their attention.

It may be true that real people by and large have to do what they can to “resist” or perhaps better, negotiate the impacts of globalization locally. But this does not mean that the world can actually be changed simply by creating indigenous autonomy in the Selva Lacandona, however much we might admire the resilience and vision of people faced with both economic hardship and continuing human rights abuse or, for that matter, the EZLN’s not always gentle approach to managing dissent and giving hope to its loyalists. Maintaining a grounded optimism of the spirit requires a realistic appraisal of situations and possibilities, orientated to supporting the efforts of movements themselves to recognize contradictions and seek ways of transcending them. This includes the alliance-building process that seems so necessary to giving

local manifestations of dissent with the existing political and economic order greater leverage. Here, of course, I am getting close to Gramsci's original conception of "hegemony" in terms of class alliance and intellectual and moral leadership, an essentially practical and political frame of thought. What we might now hope to purge from Gramsci's original conception was the kind of prejudice that emerges from his accounts of the lack of culture and fanaticism of the Southern Italian peasantry. But that still leaves us with the heterogeneity of "actually existing" people, warts and all, as the Zapatistas' often uphill struggles to instil permanent changes in the position of women in many Chiapaneco communities attest, along with problems such as the essentialization of identities that I have already discussed.

Even the bad guys are multiculturalists now

Identity politics is clearly not incompatible with demands for radical transformation of the State and structures of governance that would benefit all citizens, or with radical demands for transformation of the existing structures of social and economic power. Yet it is also important to recognize how far dominant groups have travelled in regions such as Latin America in terms of their ability to exploit the new, and apparently more pluralistic, techniques of rule associated with post-modern or neoliberal sovereignty. A striking example of this is to be found in the Brazilian state of Bahia, whose capital, Salvador, was the original centre of Portuguese colonial power, its port integrating its region into the Atlantic economy both as exporter of sugar and tobacco and as importer of the slaves that continued to form the basis of the plantation economy of the Recôncavo region until independent Brazil belatedly turned its back on both slavery and monarchical government at the very end of the 19th century.

In many senses, Salvador remained closer to Africa than to other parts of Brazil, and a good deal of attention has been paid by contemporary anthropologists and historians working on the city and the Recôncavo to the way the conservation of Black “cultures of resistance” (Reis 2003) laid the basis for a persistent popular rejection of the claims that Bahia was a paradise of racial democracy advanced not only by regional elites but by the dominant anthropological and sociological voices of an earlier generation – not simply the white, Boas-trained, Gilberto Freire but also the black Donald Pierson, trained in the Chicago of Park, Redfield and Wirth (Bacelar 2001). Although Afro-Brazilians constitute a majority in Bahia, there is another form of regional identity based on ideologies of race-mixing that tends to reject blackness as an ingredient¹¹ in favour of the idea of a European-Indian mix, that of the *caboclo* inhabitants of the arid backlands or *sertão*. Once deemed a degenerate race given to millenarian fanaticism that could have no place in Brazilian modernity, the posture that led to the war of extermination launched against the community founded by the thaumaturge Antônio Conselheiro at Canudos between 1893 and 1897, was replaced, forty years later under the populist regime of Getulio Vargas, with a more benign notion of the redeemability and aptness for “development” of these “nearly white” citizens.

As Patricia Pessar (2004) has shown in a recent study of a later “millenarian” episode, the Pedro Bautista movement, this reflected the willingness of the new generation of thaumaturges to collaborate with the project of Vargas’s

¹¹ Although the identity of *os sertões* and their place in a racialized hierarchy has, in an important sense, been constructed by others, it is important to stress that denigration of blackness is embedded in the social practices of the communities themselves, as evidenced, for example, by the way factional conflicts in the religious community tend to debouch into accusations that one’s opponents are “dark”, and therefore clearly of African descent, aiming, as their kind would, to introduce Afro-Brazilian elements into a Christian community, through the practise of witchcraft (*macumba*) (Pessar 2004: 182–183).

Estado Novo: establishing his community with the collaboration of the local political boss and principal landowner, one of the *coroneis* (colonels) whose dominion was reinforced by the accommodations that Vargas made with the rural dominant classes to ensure the viability of a larger populist project centred on pre-emptive control of the growing urban working classes, Bautista himself became a local boss, and subsequently brokered the entry of the federal state into his domain by sponsoring one of its agricultural colonization programs. He also ensured that the members of his community cast their votes for the parties of his political patrons, and spared them the embarrassment of an association with “fanatics” by keeping the public profile of the community’s religious life as low as possible. Yet as Pessar shows, this “successful” strategy of compliant heterodoxy created a number of longer-term contradictions precisely because the religious practice of the community was far from being inessential to its reproduction. This became even more apparent when the official public image of the backlanders underwent a further transformation in line with the transition to liberal multiculturalism and the decline in rural livelihood possibilities.

Yesterday’s “fanatics” now had a new value as bearers of a rich “folkloric” tradition, now seen as integral to Brazilian national uniqueness, and community leaders in charge of municipal government enthusiastically embraced state government offers to help them to convert their town into a centre for religious tourism. These moves have, however, provoked opposition from those members of the community who still take their religion seriously, a matter that has become increasingly tangled since faced with growing competition from Protestant Evangelical Churches, the Catholic Church now looks more benignly on less orthodox traditions, while still drawing the line at spirit possession, not to mention reincarnation (Pessar 2004: 214). At the same time, Pessar suggests, the older linkages between

millenarianism and social and political protest continue to live on in the stance taken by priests aligned with the Theology of Liberation and the MST.

Attempts to “domesticate” forms of “difference” that have, at least to a degree, been associated with challenges to the existing order of power relations may not therefore run completely smoothly, not least because the livelihoods that they can offer to ordinary people are likely to be limited. Yet it is important to grasp the precise nature of the elite forces behind the growth of liberal multiculturalism in Bahia. Bahian politics today are dominated by the Party of the Liberal Front (PFL), whose leading figure remains the powerful regional boss (*cacique*) Antonio Carlos Magalhães, best known by his initials, ACM. A protégé of the military, ACM and his party have played a key role in recent Brazilian politics, reaching accommodations with both Fernando Enrique Cardoso and the current president of the Workers’ Party, Lula, which were vital to the ability of both to govern effectively.

ACM has a dark reputation: he has been accused of spectacular degrees of corruption and political murder, and recently escaped being expelled from the federal Senate after a wire-tapping scandal, in itself something of a confirmation of popular views about the intrinsic solidarity in wrong-doing of the entire political class, irrespective of ideological posture. Yet this very darkness may actually be an asset in his projection of a powerful imaginary of his personal power, which is backed up materially by the resources needed to sustain a wide-ranging patronage network. Be that as may be, the strength of the Liberals in general, also demonstrated by the fact that the outgoing prefect of Salvador, Antônio Imbassahy, enjoyed the highest approval ratings in the country of any mayor in the country in 2004, lies very much in the skill with which it has played the multiculturalist card. ACM has achieved notable popularity, bordering on devotion, in key sectors of Bahia’s majority Black

community by fostering pan-Africanism and subsidizing Black culture in a way that has produced political as well as commercial benefits.

In order to further to take this project further, Imbassahy has invested heavily in beautifying Salvador for tourism, in a way that his opponents note has left far too many working black class people not merely still jobless, but living in deteriorating physical circumstances as massive road construction projects and condominium developments have taken priority over improving drainage and other infrastructure investments more relevant to the needs of ordinary citizens. Yet despite the loudness of some of the voices of protest, the liberal multiculturalist project cannot be dismissed as simply a fig-leaf for a new kind of commercial development that makes Salvador a capital of the exotic catering to the desires and fantasies of a wide range of foreign visitors, ranging from college students to armies of sex tourists. The political base of the PFL includes Black cultural organizations with deep historical roots, and it is necessary to recognize that there is quite a continuum of positions that organizations and individuals can adopt between complete cooptation and complicity, on the one hand, and outright rejection and resistance, on the other. This is a genuine game of negotiation, which the Liberals have proved adept at playing, whilst the overall balance of social forces and realistic assessments of the possible have promoted realism amongst their opponents, a preference for confrontation through street theatre rather than at the barricades.

This is not to say that these tactics can entirely erase the underlying social tensions provoked by grotesque levels of inequality and a deteriorating labour market for poorer Black people as a result of the squeezing of the incomes of real middle-class households (as distinct from those of richer citizens who describe themselves as middle-class). As I have described

elsewhere (Gledhill 2004: 345), even the quintessential annual expression of multiculturalism in Salvador's carnival – “the world's biggest street party” – not only graphically exhibits the cleavages that remain but fails to suppress violent manifestations of these underlying tensions, as much because of as despite an overwhelming security presence by the military police. What it is to say is that discussion of political possibilities at a particular moment has to start from an understanding of structural power in both its socio-economic and “governmentality” dimensions, with a focus on the complex dynamics of hegemonic processes, seen in Roseberry's sense, as a means of understanding “struggle” that does not start from the premise that there is some completely un-colonized autonomous domain of “resistant” consciousness yet also recognizes the scope for subalterns to produce and reproduce their own ideas.

That also means not settling for deconstruction or “speaking truth to power” alone (which is not to deny that both strategies have their uses and appropriate contexts). We may not be able to see the future clearly but we learn enough about the past and the present to make more than gestures of solidarity. Anthropology can make valuable contributions to the self-reflective development of the actors in the political situations that we study. They may as often as not fail to agree with our ideas about how and on which fronts to move forward, but if intellectuals have any usefulness at all, it must be in terms of trying to help to expand local visions.

Our own (personal and collective) visions are, of course, also, inevitably, parochial and blinkered in their own way, and I have not managed to avoid the questionable use of the anthropological “we” in the course of this paper. Yet there are alternatives to either a self-deluding confidence in the authority of our science (and in perspectives in our field that emanate exclusively from Northern academics and citizens) or the complete disengagement that enables

us to write deconstructionist prose at a safe distance or content ourselves with representing the “other” to and for ourselves. We can be more active and engaged participants in the messy intersecting fields of power that we study.

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