Introduction: A Case for Rethinking Resistance

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This book explores what scholarly use of the notion of “resistance” can contribute to our understanding of the history and contemporary social and political life of Brazil and Mexico. At first sight, our theme might seem anachronistic. Although “resistance studies” became an academic “boom industry” in the 1980s (Moore, 1998: 348), the next decade brought a wave of critiques. Some critics, such as Ortner (1995), remained sympathetic to the idea that resistance studies possessed a worthwhile object of analysis but called for that analysis to become more nuanced theoretically and more grounded in close ethnographic observation. Others, however, argued that misplaced moral fervor had driven anthropology and cultural studies towards an excessive – and often totally misconceived – focus on “resistance”, which, along with an obsession with the ubiquitous presence of power in human affairs, had ended up producing more analytical triviality than enlightenment (Brown, 1996; Sahlins, 2002).

In the face of such critiques, one anthropologist, Robert Fletcher, confessed to thinking twice about including “resistance” in the title of his paper for fear of alienating potential readers (Fletcher, 2001: 44). Yet he went on to argue that “rethinking” could “resurrect a troubled but significant field of research” (ibid.). Fletcher’s grounds for arguing that the field deserved to survive would still be echoed by many other scholars today. “Fundamentally,” he insisted, “studies of resistance are concerned with the struggle for equality, the fight to end exploitation and achieve a more just and humane society” (ibid.). Furthermore, as some of the case studies in this book demonstrate, “resistance” is sometimes what people say they are doing when they participate in struggles to defend their lands or cultural and religious traditions, or to achieve new rights and social dignity in situations of inequality and discrimination. The inhabitants of a Nahua indigenous community that I studied in Mexico, Ostula, not only saw themselves as having engaged in a protracted historical process of “resistance” to genocide and dispossession (Gledhill, 2004), but more recently, in 2006, declared themselves, in a new alignment with the movement led by the Zapatista Army of National Liberation, a “community in resistance” to the agrarian certification programs, Procede and Procecom (see Baitenmann, this volume). This was the most recent move in a longstanding dispute over lands usurped
by invading ranchers in the early twentieth century, now heightened by fears that capitalist interests covet the coastal beaches and mineral resources located within their communal territory. The stakes remain high in these conflicts. The leader elected to head the commission pursuing the land claim, Diego Ramírez Domínguez, one of the community’s schoolteachers, was brutally murdered in July 2008.

This is one reason to take “resistance” seriously, and one that continues to inspire anthropologists such as Shannon Speed (2008) to frame their studies in terms of resistance. Yet Fletcher’s case presented analytical dilemmas that frequently arise in studies of “resistance,” as studies in this book also demonstrate. Although some of his research subjects, Chilean indigenous people threatened with displacement by a hydroelectric dam project contracted out to a Spanish-based multinational corporation, mounted a vigorous campaign to defend their land and cultural way of life, with the support of indigenous rights NGOs, environmental and alter-globalization activists and university intellectuals, the majority not only seemed willing to embrace resettlement as a positive opportunity to experience “development” and “progress”, but gave their votes to the political ultra-right.

This led Fletcher to critique James Scott’s paradigmatic formulation of “everyday forms of resistance” (Scott, 1985; 1990) for making it difficult to account for actors who do find their situations as oppressive as outside activists and “progressive academics” think that they should do. His response was to pose further questions about why, contrary to Scott’s assumptions, people in apparently similar situations of domination react so differently. Fletcher’s case also raises a broader question about possible bias on the part of resistance theorists with regard to the types of actors and movements deemed worthy subjects of investigation, and it is one that might possibly undermine his own argument for why resistance studies remain important. Should actors who are not at the bottom of the social scale or “popular” actors who are not struggling in a straightforward way for greater social equality or political democracy be excluded from the study of processes of “resistance” when they appear to be challenging the will of the state and elites, which could today include liberal multiculturalist elites, and if not, why not?

One way forward might be to expand the discussion of “resistance” from the narrow domain of Scott’s everyday forms of resistance to the broader field of what Tarrow calls “contentious politics.” “Contentious politics” embraces any “collective activity on the part of claimants – or those who claim to represent them – relying at
least in part on non-institutional forms of interaction with elites, opponents, or the state” (Tarrow, 1996: 874). It therefore encompasses the study of social movements, which Tarrow defines, following Tilly, as “sustained challenges to powerholders in the name of a disadvantaged population living under the jurisdiction or influence of those powerholders” (ibid.). The usefulness of pursuing the broader perspective is illustrated in this book by contributions such as Meyer and Schell’s discussions of Catholic opposition to the state in post-revolutionary Mexico. Our emphasis here is not simply on hidden worlds of subaltern resistance – though this does remain an important theme – but also on the interactions and alliances between subaltern groups and less humble social and political actors who may find themselves opposed to those currently exercising power, as well as on the way the exercise of power itself may be furthered by more adept and institutionalizing state responses to the movements that generate “contentious politics,” as exemplified by Leite’s “juridical-formal” quilombo in chapter twelve.

This book is based on intensive discussions between a group of anthropologists and historians invited to participate in three four-day research seminars, funded by the British Arts and Humanities Research Council, held in Salvador, Bahia, Mexico City, and Manchester, England. Our basic question was whether, in the light of past critiques, “resistance studies” could still be revitalized through new thinking, bearing in mind the volume of new research that has accumulated since the original “boom.” Although some participants entered the dialogue having already expressed high levels of skepticism about resistance studies, discussing what was problematic about applying resistance models to the historical or ethnographic evidence in hand proved productive of new research questions and understandings. Furthermore, the centrality of ideas of “resistance” to popular understandings of Latin American history and the contemporary political discourses of black and indigenous activists made debate about the validity of such perspectives relevant whether or not academics wished to embrace or critique them.

**Resisting Resistance**

Castro suggests in this volume that an archeology of the notion of “resistance” might trace connections between its appearance in modern Latin American movements, such as the “Five Hundred Years of Indigenous and Black Resistance” campaign, and European antecedents such as nineteenth century anarchist thought and the struggles
of the French partisans under Nazi occupation. Nevertheless, the intellectual movement that generated the “boom” in resistance studies in English-language social sciences and cultural studies in the 1980s was the product of a more recent historical conjuncture. In the United States, resistance studies emerged, as Gutmann notes in his chapter, in a climate of “diminished expectations” after the exaggerated hopes for radical social change embodied in the anti-war and civil rights movements seemed dashed by the triumph of Reaganism. The fall of the Soviet Empire reinforced a turning away from the interest in social revolutions that had produced the major comparative studies of peasant insurgency in the “Third World” in political science and anthropology during the 1960s and early 1970s (see Knight, this volume).

In Latin America, the conjuncture was different, with military regimes still in power in many countries until the mid-1980s, and others, such as Guatemala, still locked in conflicts between Leftist insurgents and authoritarian regimes backed by Washington into the 1990s. Nevertheless, the experience of dictatorship in countries such as Argentina, Brazil and Chile had scarcely enhanced the credibility of revolutionary Left projects, and also encouraged an analytical focus on more covert practices of “resistance.” Interest in resistance theories in Latin America was also promoted by other historical trends. One was the attempt to incorporate indigenous peoples into revolutionary left movements. Northern intellectuals wished to show solidarity with the struggles of groups that revolutionary socialists and capitalist modernizers alike within the region had deemed a reproach on national dreams of achieving “modernity” (Beverley, 1999). Stoll (1999) has controversially argued that the solidarity work of U.S. scholars around the iconic testimonio book *I, Rigoberta Menchú* actually prolonged the violence in Guatemala past the point at which the guerrilla would otherwise have been eliminated (see Knight, this volume). From Stoll’s perspective, Menchú was a Marxist revolutionary wolf masquerading in the sheep’s clothing of a young Maya peasant woman, but the resistance theme was taken up by Latin American intellectuals working against the grain of both the assimilationist policies of developmental states and orthodox left positions in which issues of class override questions of ethnicity, race and gender. Scott’s work has been criticized for its focus on “an analytics of class to the exclusion of other productive and social inequalities (notably gender, age and ethnicity)” (Moore, 1998: 350), but Mexican scholars focusing on indigenous issues, such as López (1996) and Coronado (2000), have found his ideas useful.
A second factor was the experience of authoritarian states. A strategy of “capturing the state” and turning it into an instrument of national development through the expansion of the public sector had not enhanced its credibility through a long history of populist cooptation of popular movements, official corruption and forms of capitalist development that had had only a limited impact on social inequalities. Resistance theory as a celebration of the centred “popular subject” took its place alongside “new social movements theory” as tools for thinking about more radically democratic alternatives in an era in which democratization itself generally got off to a cautious and conservative start.

Yet Latin American scholarship is not a simple replication of gringo scholarship, even if North American and European social theory often appears strongly hegemonic (Restrepo and Escobar, 2005). For example, the Gramsci that many Latin American scholars work with generally looks more like the Italian Communist strategist than the “lite” version appropriated, through the British literary critic Raymond Williams, for incorporation into the North American cultural anthropology paradigm (Crehan, 2002). Nor has the politics of Latin America stood still since the mid-1980s. If part of this regional political history is about attempts to “democratize democracy” and proposals for reforming the state, political classes and electoral politics from below, another part is increasingly focused on what might still be done through “capturing” national states in the era of globalization. Many local organic intellectuals also remain to be convinced that revolutionary class-based politics is yesterday’s paradigm, as one of the lawyers representing imprisoned members of the Popular Assembly of the Peoples of Oaxaca, discussed by Gutmann in this volume, demonstrated in a speech I heard in England. Yet whether the politics is one of state capture or pluralistic radical democratization from below that eschews electoral participation, as advocated by the neo-Zapatista movement in Mexico, much of it does not seem to be an “infrapolitics” focused on words or gestures of defiance behind the backs of the dominant of the kind on which Scott focuses our attention, “an unobtrusive realm of political struggle” based on “the veiled cultural struggle and political expression of subordinate groups who have ample reason to fear venturing their unguarded opinion” (Scott, 1990: 183–184).

Yet if the resistance theories of the 1980s were born in an historical conjuncture that has passed, at least some of the respects in which they were part of a broader concern with power and power relations remain at the centre of current
academic debates. In particular, we have the influence of Michel Foucault and his celebrated contention, in the first volume of *The History of Sexuality*, that “where there is power, there is also resistance” (Foucault 1978: 95–96). As an account of the workings of power on human subjects, it was even a perspective that could be mobilized against some of the more “romantic” accounts of “resistance” offered by the first generation of resistance theorists.

The best example of this is Lila Abu-Lughod’s attempt to turn Foucault on his head by taking up the implications of his contention that “resistance is never in a position of exteriority to power” and retranslating his original dictum into “where there is resistance, there is power” (Abu-Lughod, 1990: 42). For Abu-Lughod, the advantage for anthropologists of “using resistance as a diagnostic of power” was that they could move away from abstract theories of power to the ethnographic “study of power in particular situations.” In her ethnographic examination of the apparently safe spaces in which Bedouin women could enjoy a smoke and elaborate their “hidden transcripts” about such matters as male vices and arranged marriages, Abu-Lughod discusses the ambivalent implications of the social and economic changes which led some women to wear make up and add negligees to their trousseaux. She concludes:

In resisting the axes of kin and gender, the young women who want the lingerie, Egyptian songs, satin wedding dresses, and fantasies of private romance their elders resist are perhaps unwittingly emmeshing themselves in an extraordinary complex new set of power relations. These bind them irrecoverably to the Egyptian economy, itself tied to the global economy, and to the Egyptian state, many of whose powers depend on separating kin groups and regulating individuals. (Abu-Lughod, 1990: 52)

Nevertheless, after posing the question of whether “certain modern forms and techniques of power work in such indirect ways, or seem to offer such positive attractions, that people do not as readily resist them”, she goes on to show how the adoption of modest Islamic dress and participation in Islamic movements represents a further possible reaction to the contradictions that these new entanglements with global capitalism and the state pose for women who remain relatively socially marginalized. Yet fundamentalist practices not only entail yet another set of disciplines, but also tie the participants into another set of new transnational structures, the religious nationalisms of global Islam (ibid.).
Here, then, the invocation of Foucault has led us away from the fixed
dichotomies between “dominant” and “subaltern” classes and the spaces of freedom
in which unfettered “resistance” may be practiced towards a more complex account in
which “resistance” can be recognized but its effects on power relations more subtly
diagnosed. As Moore (1998: 351) points out, Scott’s theory of “infrapolitics”
combines the “hidden transcript” metaphor with spatial metaphors, in particular the
binary opposition, borrowed from Erving Goffman, between “on-stage” and “off-
stage.” “Hidden” resistance takes place by assumption in fixed sites assigned to
subalterns “where power does not saturate or colonize” their consciousness, and no
consideration can be given to how spaces and places and the boundaries between
them (such as “public” versus “private”) are constructed through the workings of
power relations and challenges to them. Following earlier objections to Scott’s
absolutist view of spaces of subaltern autonomy (Starn, 1992: 94), Moore also points
out that the Foucauldian position developed by Abu-Lughod can be seen as one that
Gramsci anticipated in speaking of the “limited and partial autonomy” of subaltern
groups, which remain subject to the “activity” of dominant groups even when they are
engaged in counter-hegemonic struggles against them (Moore, 1998: 352).

However, as Ortner (1995: 174–175) points out, one positive effect of Scott’s
drawing attention to “everyday forms of resistance” was to complement the
Foucauldian complication of the original “domination and resistance” binary
opposition by invoking a whole series of debates around which acts might or might
not reasonably be characterized as “resistance.” This led to a series of revisions that
highlighted the ambivalent quality of the acts themselves and the ambivalent
subjectivities that tended to accompany relations between actors from dominant and
subordinate groups. Not only were practices of “collaboration” often co-present with
apparent practices of “resistance”, but it rapidly became apparent that “subaltern”
groups had to be unpacked into actors differentiated by age, gender, status and other

The “subject position” concept is central to poststructuralist and postmodernist
thinking, and here Ortner also highlights the difficulties of Scott’s tendency to ascribe
a single and fixed identity to subalterns within a “structural grid of class oppositions”
(Moore, 1998: 350). Identities and subjectification are in part the social product of the
classificatory schemes of others (which social actors can either affirm or reject, but
not necessarily escape in their daily life). In contemporary societies, cultures of
consumerism and “lifestyle” augment the possibilities of individual identity construction, but possible subject positions are multiple in most contexts: the same woman can be a woman, a poor woman, a peasant woman, a virtuous mother, a Catholic woman, etc. They are also situational, with one aspect of identity being appropriate for one context, and another, possibly contrasting with or even conflicting with the first, more suited to managing a different context of interaction. A canny and well-connected peasant politician will often find it convenient to become a humble and uneducated son of the pueblo, for example. Yet whilst all this is useful, Ortner also points out that there is a danger here, manifest in the deconstructionist work of Spivak, of “dissolving” the subject as living agent in a social context altogether (Ortner, 1995: 184–186). Focusing on such internal differentiation, Ortner complained that one major problem with resistance theory was that despite its apparent expansion of the definition of “political” action, it did not contain enough politics at the end of the day, given that the dominant-subordinate opposition often concealed the lively internal politics within subaltern populations (Ortner, 1995: 177). The analysis of the internal politics of subalterns became one of the major crosscutting themes of the case studies presented in this book.

A defender of Scott’s pioneering work could, however, argue that these revisions enriched rather than totally invalidated a paradigm that had served a useful purpose as a corrective to previous thinking, complementing other important contributions such as the work of E.P Thompson and the work of US and Brazilian historians of slavery (see Slenes, this volume). Scott’s writing challenged some of the distinctions habitually made between “pre-political” forms of action and supposedly more “effective”, politically and socially transformative, type of consciousness. It brought consideration of the politics of marginalized social groups onto the analytical agenda, and promoted rethinking of the application of terms such as “utopian” and “millenarian” to particular forms of “infrapolitical” practices, in particular those associated with religion. Many of the practices discussed in the resistance literature deserved recognition and study, even if further analysis showed that some which were over-hastily identified as “resistance” were susceptible to more complex readings.

There was considerable value in recognizing unvoiced and subterranean practices of resistance in forms of behavior that had not previously been considered in such terms and in contexts where too much had been assumed about the docility of subaltern groups and the depths of their complicity in their own domination. The work
of anthropologists such as Jean and John Comaroff (1991) might be accused of exaggerating the real challenge to power relations posed by movements such as the Zionist Churches in southern Africa, but it played an important role in highlighting the limitations of trying to think about such contexts in terms of occidental Marxist ideas about what “working class consciousness” should look like and the yardstick of an equally occidental vision of “revolutionary” politics.

Nevertheless, the fact that resistance theory came to substitute for earlier visions of “socially progressive” politics skewed the paradigm in unfortunate ways that Gutmann exposes in this book in critiquing the kind of “realism” embedded in Scott’s account of “lower-class politics.” At the root of this problem is Scott’s effort to dismiss what Roseberry (1994) argued was a straw-man account of Gramscian “hegemony” by presenting the subaltern as a deeply knowing, non-mystified, elaborator of rich cultural practices of disguised resistance inhibited from more overt action only by a shrewd assessment of its impracticality. Another important bias was the tendency to ignore “popular movements” that appeared to be reactionary by traditional Left standards, as well as forms of resistance that adopted pacific and non-confrontational forms for reasons other than fear (Meyer, this volume). In the areas where Mexican Catholics did take up arms in the Cristero rebellion, peasant insurgents seemed to be “resisting” the putatively more “progressive” agrarian reform movement in the name of an institution that seemed an integral part of the structures of domination of landlordism, the Catholic Church. Yet ascribing the label “progressive” immediately betrays judgments on the part of the observer not only about what counts as “objective class interest” but also about what peasants should want most out of life, in a particular historical context (Knight, this volume). Since people in apparently similar socio-economic situations could be found in opposing camps, the Cristiada not only returns us to Fletcher’s problem of explaining such differences but also forces us to consider the kinds of variables that might be most relevant to explaining political differences amongst “subalterns.”

**From “resistance” through “power” to “hegemony”**

The most trenchant critiques do not stop at critiquing “resistance.” Sahlins, for example, attacked “the current Foucauldian-Gramscian-Nietzschean obsession with power,” dubbing it “the latest incarnation of Anthropology’s incurable Functionalism” (Sahlins, 2002: 20–21), seeking to explain everything and ending up explaining
nothing (Castro, this volume). While Ortner maintained that “resistance, even at its most ambiguous, is a reasonably useful category, if only because it highlights the presence and play of power in most forms of relationship and activity” (Ortner, 1995: 175, emphasis added), critics such Sahlins find arguments about the pervasiveness of power disturbing. Brown (1996: 4) argues that Foucault merely offers us “culture as prison, culture as insane asylum, culture as ‘hegemonic domination of the [insert Other of choice].’” This is not the view of Abu-Lughod, whom Brown also cites, since she simply points out that all forms of attempted emancipation may have their price. In a similar way, Sahlins’s huffing and puffing overstates its perfectly reasonable case for not trying to explain everything in the world of culture as either a product or expression of power relationships by seeming to turn down the opportunities that Ortner welcomes for looking at how power relationships might enter into the production and transformation of culture.

Let us consider how an avowed Foucauldian might respond to the kind of critique that Brown makes. Nelson (2005) examines two “biopolitical” interventions by the Guatemalan military state, one the counter-insurgency campaign against indigenous communities of the 1980s and the other the “all out war” against malaria declared by Guatemalan Health Ministry in 1955. Her first step is a rethinking of indigenous insurgency. By 1988, when it was clear that the guerrilla had lost the armed struggle and factionalization ensued, it was also clear that many indigenous people were now rejecting the shared emphasis of the state, non-indigenous guerrilla leaderships and their (now decimated) indigenous allies on “modernizing the country” by leaving indigenous culture behind. The war itself, and experiences of racism in the guerrilla ranks, encouraged different visions of “liberation,” including organization around Maya identity and cultural rights (Nelson, 2005: 223). The army followed its scorched earth policy of the early 1980s with a “development pole” strategy that combined discipline and surveillance with food aid, housing and health care programs that attracted funds from churches and NGOs as well as foreign governments (ibid: 223–224). Thus, in place of simple opposition between a pure resisting people and a brutal military regime, the war revealed more complex alignments and tensions, putting into question whether “collaboration” was simply the result of fear of death, and it ended up delivering more of the things that indigenous people in Guatemala had previously been demanding, such as schools and health care. In Foucauldian terms, “the popular struggle for a more equitable distribution of the common wealth” in
Guatemala produced a “reverse discourse” that “demanded that its legitimacy be acknowledged by using the same categories by which it was originally disqualified” (ibid: 225).

In the case of malaria eradication campaigns, a quintessential expression of deployment of the techniques of “modern government,” there is another kind of ambivalence to what is at stake in terms of power. The implementation of the programs required intimate knowledge of the population at the level of households (to ensure the success of medication programs), knowledge which could later be put to life destroying purposes, but which, in this original context, also fostered a new interest amongst peasants in collaborating with the state (and with each other) even though some – as in the case of the guerrilla’s call for arms – also refused to cooperate (ibid: 233).

Malaria eradication was not a wholly humanitarian enterprise, since the campaigns made the lowland environment and an indigenous labor force weakened by disease more productive for capitalists. Yet malaria eradication cannot be reduced to that one-dimensional socio-political explanation, because hygiene is not simply a matter of “social control.” Although the campaigns strengthened the state in some ways, they did not undermine the case of coastal labor organizers that improved health care was as necessary as better wages and working conditions (obliging the state and the landlords to continue to murder them). Invoking Bruno Latour alongside Foucault, Nelson argues that these two biopolitical processes both illustrate the principle that new sources of power and legitimacy are constantly being introduced into political processes since human actors are neither totally autonomous subjects nor “docile automatons” but bound up in complexes of relations “through which power always flows in more than one direction” (ibid: 234).

If Foucault can be defended against the critiques of Brown and Sahlins, it is also worth following up Moore’s suggestion that Foucault’s claim that “resistance is never in a position of exteriority to power” was anticipated by Gramsci’s account of the politics of subalternity (Moore, 1998: 353). In making this argument, Moore departs from Roseberry’s critique of Scott’s interpretation of Gramscian “hegemony” as a variant of the “dominant ideology” thesis and his suggestion that hegemony should be explored “not as a finished and monolithic ideological formation but as a problematic, contested, political process of domination and struggle” (ibid: 351).
As Crehan (2002: 173) points out, anthropological appropriations of Gramsci tend to reduce hegemony “solely to the domain of ideas, beliefs, meanings and values.” The same is true of Scott, who develops his arguments as a critique of the idea that subalterns are afflicted by a “false consciousness” produced by “a dominant or hegemonic ideology” (Scott, 1990: 71). On this basis he distinguishes between “thick” and “thin” concepts of hegemony, the former representing a situation in which subalterns simply accept the legitimacy of rule by the dominant, and the latter a situation in which the subalterns are convinced by the dominant that they are powerless to change the system (ibid: 72). Scott rejects both types of hegemony on the grounds that subalterns are never mystified by the ideologies propagated by their betters and therefore always predisposed to “resist” exploitation and domination, yet will not rebel against the system if they judge rebellion too costly an option.

Fletcher (2001: 47) follows Mitchell (1990) and Tilly (1991) in arguing that an individual rational actor model lies at the heart of Scott’s arguments on hegemony (Knight, this volume). Rebellion, in Tilly’s words (1991: 599), becomes a matter of “crude individualized rationality” while the propensity of all subaltern populations to rebel, given the opportunity, is guaranteed (and therefore put beyond the need for further explanation) by Scott’s assumption that there is always a “unitary and shared” hidden transcript that expresses their inevitable “resistance.” Tilly concludes that “such an argument displaces to another level the questions that bedevil theories of hegemonic ideology,” such as “how do subalterns construct, share and change their discourses?” (ibid.: 598) These problems do not bedevil Gramsci’s account of hegemony. Hegemony is never synonymous with ideology in Gramsci’s writings, since it “always involves practical activity, and the social relations that produce inequality, as well as the ideas by which that inequality is justified, explained, normalized, and so on” (Crehan, 2002: 174, emphasis added).

Gramsci’s analyses were historically specific. Although he subscribed to the Marxist thesis of “determination by the economic base in the last instance,” he did not think it possible to understand the concrete realities of a country at a given historical moment without taking into account other types of determinants, all the sedimented products of a particular history. Gramscian analysis does not offer us “the dominant” versus “subalterns,” but historical blocs of differentiated elite groups and institutions confronting equally differentiated “popular” classes. Gramsci urged his communist militants to strive to understand the “feelings” of the “popular element” (Crehan,
In order to understand how people lived their class situations, how the differences within and between subalterns reflected the impacts of particular forms of domination-exploitation on their subjectivities and “contradictory consciousness” (see Gutmann, this volume), not simply as impositions but as results of active subaltern responses to domination. For Gramsci, subaltern practices that might be described as “resistance” would never be sufficient to create a new society without the higher labors of the party and its intellectuals, but they would have a practical impact on how rule was accomplished – the existing hegemony – and on the way in which the party should try to forge its own (counter-)hegemony by building bridges between rural folk and urban workers.

The Gramscian view is thus that although the actions and reactions of subaltern groups influence what ruling classes do and how rule is accomplished, the worldviews and practices of “resistance” of subalterns cannot be fully autonomous of the historical matrix of power relations in which they were embedded. Putting these two ideas together, we arrive at Roseberry’s alternative reading of Gramscian hegemony, which both Pessar and Zárate employ in their analyses in this book. Roseberry argues that “the dominated” are, at least up to a point, obliged to talk the same language as the dominant in order to engage in a meaningful “counter-hegemonic practice” and that this has material consequences. Yet against Scott’s treatment of the languages of power and contestation as fixed “scripts” in what Moore (1998: 351) describes as a “static theater of resistance,” Roseberry suggests that hegemony should be used to understand “struggle” rather than “consent to rule”:

What hegemony constructs, then, 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. (Roseberry, 1994: 361)

**Oblique Powers**

Although there are aspects of Gramsci’s writings that anticipate Foucault’s ideas about disciplinary processes and modern “governmentality,” Gramscian history, with its interests in agents exercising political leadership and the dynamics of factionalism at the top and the bottom of society, is a different animal to Foucault’s “subjectless” version. Nevertheless, Foucault’s ideas have been central to attempts to conceptualize how neoliberal techniques of government differ from those of the period before the 1980s in regions such as Latin America. A number of the chapters in the book that
discuss contemporary situations focus our attention on the way neoliberalism may have reconfigured the contexts of “resistance movements” in recent years.

The title of this section refers to the work of García Canclini on the “cultural reorganization of power” during the last decades of the twentieth century. García Canclini (1995: 209) argues that the old form of populist (associational) politics have declined, along with the credibility of “all-encompassing social movements,” and especially class-based political parties, while television has displaced the “massive use of the city for political theatricalization.” Although the power of today’s more fragmented social movements grows if they mass together, and use modern rather than traditional forms of communication, economic changes, including the disappearance of stable work, transform the nature of social life and interaction: the public stage is for consumption and display of status, work invades the private time even of elites, and the poor have to have multiple sources of livelihood, often in the so-called “informal sector,” which by 2006 accounted for 44 percent of urban jobs in Mexico, according to the OECD estimates. García Canclini argues that these changes produce a “disintegrated imaginary public sphere” (ibid: 210). Whatever one thinks about García Canclini’s take on class (Gutmann, this volume), the point that I want to capture from him is the idea that whereas power once worked more or less vertically, it now works “obliquely” in ways that may be important.

One issue is the commodification at the heart of contemporary “market society,” a commodification that enters every more deeply into the production of the subject, personhood and social life itself. One possible implication of these developments is illustrated by Sansone’s (2004) study of young men in marginalized neighborhoods of Salvador, who reject badly paid, casualized and menial jobs to find other ways of participating in a globalized black consumer culture, including the participation in the world of gangs and drugs that may gain them a greater “respect” on the street. Sansone argues that young black men from the poorest districts of Salvador are less deferential to their white social superiors than their parents, and less likely to seek solace in Afro-Brazilian religion (2004: 57). Yet their everyday struggles for recognition of “personhood” do not strengthen an “oppositional consciousness” (see Schell, this volume) in relation to dominant social groups. Since discrimination on grounds of color may be attenuated by perceived class position, young men strive to mask their actual class status and present themselves in public space as co-participants in a modernity of shared consumer symbols, albeit with an
inflection of black “style” which is attractive to other sectors of Salvador’s society providing it is decoupled from their everyday fears of assault by the inhabitants of the city’s “brown zones.”

Many Brazilians and Mexicans do participate in collective social movements that are explicitly anti-neoliberal, including place-based movements against the development projects of foreign corporations and their politically connected domestic allies. Yet another “oblique power” effect arises from the way that problems such as diminished personal security affect everyone, including relatively militant citizens, producing a variety of forms of fear and loathing of “others”. The state of Mexico might be celebrated as the region that produced the struggle of the people of Atenco against the expropriation of their ejido lands for Mexico City’s new airport (Stolle-McAllister, 2005). Moreover, many reasonable citizens proved reluctant to buy the media efforts to paint the people of Atenco as violent and lawless during and after the police assault on the town in 2006, particularly once the evidence for the sexual abuse of women by the public security forces became incontrovertible. Yet the state of Mexico is also close to the top of the national league table for incidence of lynching (Vilas, 2002). Although lynching can be related to the damage neoliberalism has done to the social fabric in a general way, it can also be the downside of a strong commitment to a defense of “community integrity” that can be celebrated as “resistance.” “Resisting” the effects of neoliberalism through an enraged “self-help” popular justice system reinforces the oblique power effects of living in a constantly deteriorating economic and social situation in which the official justice system and police often victimize the guiltless but powerless.

From the social effects of neoliberal economic transformations, I now turn to the political effects of neoliberal styles of government. Latin America has seen some promotion of what Rose (1999) terms “government at a distance,” effected through processes of fiscal and administrative decentralization, and a heightened role for non-governmental organizations, not simply in the delivery of services but in the building of capacity to exercise “citizenship,” particularly amongst poorer sectors of society. Even some social movements have been transformed into NGOs or their leaderships incorporated into government at different levels. This has led analysts such as Foweraker (2001) to argue that “democratization” actually weakened social movements during the 1990s. As organization and professionalization increased, “autonomy” diminished. Tensions emerged between leaderships and bases, and
between professionals drawing a salary and volunteers. From this perspective, neoliberal “inclusion” defuses potential “resistance” by creating empty public rituals of participation accompanied by intensive backstage processes of co-optation and political clientelism, all disguised behind a rhetoric of “recognizing the capacity of poor people to exercise their citizenship” and slogans such as “rights to the city”.

Such an assessment seems, however, to be too pessimistic. Not all NGOs are vehicles for disseminating values appropriate for a neoliberal market society in which citizens have a duty to “help themselves” and maximize their market opportunities in return for any assistance, even if their interventions still have the kinds of ambivalent effects highlighted in De la Peña, Parés and Hita’s contributions to this book. Social movements and community associations often reject leaderships that are seen to have got too close to politicians, and engaging government institutions does not necessarily entail simple cooptation, as Hita’s chapter also demonstrates. Although NGOs and governments alike often pursue projects that seek to create neoliberal social subjects, such projects seem to produce “resistances” and unintended consequences that militate against the production of docile citizens. This does not mean that the impact of contemporary governmentality projects is negligible, but it does mean, to return to Nelson’s point, that they seldom produce simply the effects that their architects desired.

While the neoliberal rhetoric of “citizenship”, “participation” and “empowerment” does seem to offer spaces for subalterns and their organizations to gain new voices and influence in the public sphere, the potential trap, as Hale (2002) points out in discussing neoliberal multiculturalism, is that the institutionalization of these spaces, along with a politics of rights and recognition, whether restricted to the state sphere or mediated through NGOs, creates a boundary that separates movements and demands that are acceptable from those that are “too radical.” Municipal autonomy might also simply make localities more governable and advance an agenda of helping local people solve their own problems with local resources. The political problem is that neoliberal transformations create winners as well as losers, while the kind of participation that neoliberal government at a distance offers is certainly attractive to some of the “popular actors.” Even once radical and independent figures, such as militants of the indigenous rights movement, may receive tempting offers of positions in government organizations, their employability enhanced because they will remain credible while they implement programs designed to acknowledge the
justice of some indigenous complaints while ensuring that nothing gets pushed “too far” (towards challenging private sector interests, for example) and that official channels substitute for an independent politics of protest. There are also social issues to consider here, such as the personal desires of individuals for a better standard of living and the comforts of an urban life; it has become common even for independent radicals to move to towns where contact with NGOs is easier rather than stay in rural communities, from which they become increasingly estranged. Many people decide that it is more productive as well as realistic to work within Hale’s boundary than beyond it: as Zárate’s chapter in this volume shows, even “radical” movements may worry about questions of “legality.”

This, then, is the neoliberal governmentality project at its most successful, appropriating much of the language that used to be associated with the Left, introducing new principles that foster “the responsible self” and “rebuilding of a sense of community”, and canalizing “resistance” into manageable channels. However, we are talking about projects, not achieved practical realities, and societies are neither prisons nor asylums. The contributions to this book suggest that the artifices of neoliberal governmentality are far from extinguishing popular challenges to the current order of things in Latin America, although they do complicate their politics and often, as Parés suggests in this volume, oblige us to ask where “resistance” as practice with genuinely counter-hegemonic qualities is located in today’s world.

**Brazil and Mexico as a comparative framework**

Brazil and Mexico are profoundly unequal societies built on foundations of colonial conquest and enslavement. This is the frame in which social movement activists and engaged academics talk of the “resistance” of indigenous and black people to “domination” and “exploitation,” one of the connotations, for example, of the *quilombola* movement in Brazil, discussed by Leite in this volume. Yet we might also see another kind of “resistance” in the historical reproduction of cultures and identities with roots in aboriginal America or Africa: “resistance” as conservation and temporal continuity, a conservative rather than “revolutionary” process (see Pessar, Parés and De la Peña, this volume). Although we were careful to ensure that our discussion would not be restricted to historical actors who see themselves as “indigenous” or “afro-descendent,” it is appropriate that such actors do occupy a prominent place in our discussions.
Another goal of our project was to promote cross-disciplinary dialogue between scholars working on Mexico and Brazil on an issue of common interest that would lend itself to reflection on the differences and similarities between the most populous and economically powerful countries in Latin America. Such dialogues have not been particular common in recent years, yet their value became immediately apparent in the discussions that developed within our group. We do not make exaggerated claims about the systematicity of our efforts at comparison. This is not an attempt to explore how common structural variables relate to each other in different national contexts of the kind that characterized some efforts to explain the occurrence or non-occurrence of agrarian revolutions in the literature that preceded the resistance studies boom, such as Paige (1975). Still less does the approach adopted by our contributors conform to the quantitative multivariate analysis paradigm that appeals to some historians of the longue durée, as well as social scientists interested in inter-country comparisons, as a means for exploring questions such as the impact of economic cycles on social mobilization and political conflict (Tarrow, 1996: 877). Historical and ethnographic narratives of process in relation to structural conditions dominate in the analyses offered here. This approach helps us to explore the complexity of the social, cultural and political logics of processes in a way that all too often escaped earlier analyses of “resistance,” whilst still raising broader comparative questions, as Knight’s concluding reflections in this book make clear.

It will be useful to add a few more concrete observations about comparing Brazil and Mexico before I outline how the individual chapters in this volume make their contributions to rethinking the debates on resistance. Brazil achieved its independence in 1822 as an “empire” still ruled by a member of the Portuguese Royal Family and dominated by slave-owning landed classes. The Muslim slave revolt in Salvador in 1832 (Reis, 2003) was one of the consequences of the slave owners’ ability to resist the extension to society as a whole of the liberal principles to which the Empire’s constitution paid lip service, although there is much more to be said about these issues as Slenes’s contribution to this volume demonstrates. Even after British pressure strengthened the hand of Brazilian abolitionists sufficiently to end the Atlantic trade in 1850, it still took a further thirty-eight years for the emancipation of existing slaves to be completed, and freedom did not necessarily imply a great deal of positive change in the lives of rural plantation workers. Slavery had enduring effects on Brazilian society even after its ethnic composition was further modified by new
immigration by affecting the status of “free” lower class Brazilians and creating a society in which all depended on the “favor” of their social superiors (Schwarz, 1992). Nevertheless, society in colonial or independent Brazil could hardly be reduced to a two-class model of homogeneous agrarian elites “dominating” an equally homogeneous subaltern population. Not all “subalterns” were slaves, or former slaves, let alone “blacks” (pretos or pardos). There were poor backlands people who saw themselves as “whites” or mestiços produced by race mixing between the aboriginal inhabitants of Brazil and Europeans, and the popular notion that Brazil’s Indians largely “died out” or vanished through race mixing will not get us very far in understanding Brazilian history, as Monteiro and Carvalho’s chapters demonstrate. A degree of social mobility was possible, especially for mulattos who followed a personal “whitening strategy” that affirmed elite values. From the point of view of resistance theory, a crucial problem seems to be that subalterns often seemed to “collaborating” rather than resisting, although our contributors show that this distinction may not be as simple as it seems either.

Similar issues emerge in historical chapters on Mexico by Castro and Viqueira, despite the substantial differences between Brazil and Mexico that reflect differences in indigenous social and political organization before the Europeans arrived, ecological and geographical variables, and differences in the colonial regimes themselves, differences further complicated by diverse regional histories within the two countries. Differences are nevertheless important. Despite the growth of landed estates, the Spanish Crown’s prohibition of indigenous enslavement and desire to exploit indigenous people as tribute payers to the greater benefit of the Empire entailed a degree of “protection” for the colonially created “indigenous community” that left an indelible mark on Mexican national history. Mexico has the largest absolute number of citizens professing an “indigenous” identity of any Latin American country, despite the efforts of nineteenth century liberal reformers to abolish the Indian corporate community by denying it legal personality and privatizing communal lands. Liberal efforts to create a new society of individual property-owning (and property-less) citizens “equal before the law” were followed by equally determined efforts on the part of the post-revolutionary state to encourage indigenous people to assimilate culturally into a mestizo national mainstream through land reform and the adoption of “peasant” (campesino) class identities (Boyer, 2003). Why these projects did not fully achieve their goals is a key issue in Mexican history.
An outline of the book

The papers in the first section examine the historical roles of indigenous and Afro-descendant people in the shaping of colonial and nineteenth century society. The chapters by Monteiro and Castro focus on the indigenous peoples of Brazil and Mexico in the colonial period. Both suggest that there are senses in which it remains meaningful to talk about “native resistance,” but that we will not get far by assuming, as did some colonialists, that all indigenous people responded to the colonial situation simply by striving to salvage what they could of their past culture and way of life and practicing a sullen acquiescence in an order that they generally felt incapable of overturning.

Monteiro argues that specific processes of post-colonial ethnogenesis do not simply reflect “the cultural and political struggles” of (diverse and differentiated) “native actors” to build meaningful identities and ways of living in an environment radically reshaped by colonial structures of domination, but are also “grounded in the conflicts within and among indigenous and Afro-American peoples.” Working through a wide range of examples, he highlights the variety of different ways in which indigenous polities became “engaged in the colonial project” as refugees or allies or enemies of Europeans, frequently borrowing from the cultural repertoire of the colonists and opening themselves up to innovation. Far from being a symptom of “culture loss” and incipient extinction, Monteiro suggests that these strategies gave force and meaning to the efforts of native societies and their leaders to remain actors on the colonial stage, whether their outcome was the relatively rare one of the appearance of a titled indigenous dynasty in Portuguese America or a “native point of view” in which taking on the conqueror’s religion, technology and other practices is actually a means by which the European “other” can be domesticated and absorbed.

Similar arguments have been made about Afro-Brazilians. In his contribution to this volume, Parés notes Apter’s idea that Candomblé’s mimesis of elements of the dominant Catholicism “was an embodied way of critically apprehending and ‘controlling’ the master’s spiritual universe.”

Castro’s chapter also emphasizes the need to abandon simply stories of the millennial resistance of indigenous Mexicans against their colonial masters, important though those stories have become to the contemporary indigenous autonomy movement, whilst also noting the irony that whilst riots and rebellions were common
amongst all the “popular” sectors in colonial Mexico, it is only when the protagonists are indigenous (or, in response to more recently emerging sensibilities, black slaves) that they seem to be labeled “resistance.” Castro’s discussion parallels Monteiro’s in its inclusion of indigenous “collaborators” and leaderships which opted to advance their own interests within the colonial order but he focuses his detailed analysis on achieving a deeper understanding of the political and cultural logic of what he finds it most useful to view as “resistance,” various forms of riot, protest and rebellion which, even when ritualized and symbolic, nevertheless expressed “the substrate of indignation and irritation” that lay beneath what, at least prior to the reforms of the Bourbon era, generally appeared a tranquil colonial environment of humility and respect for authority in which a good deal of the “negotiation of rule” took place through the courts.

The remaining chapters in the first section offer case studies of far from ritualized rebellions that exemplify the need to consider the diverse ways that the groups that occupied the subaltern positions in the new societies created by European colonization responded to an evolving situation, paying attention both to the kinds of relations and alliances that they established with members of differentiated and often internally conflictive groups of higher social and political status and also to the shifting politics of the relations between different subaltern groups. Viqueira’s discussion starts from a position of strong skepticism about the Manichean division between homogeneous elites and subalterns that he accuses resistance models of propagating. Taking the Cancuc rebellion in early eighteenth century Chiapas as a “best case scenario” for those who would like history to consist of a simple struggle between Indians and Spaniards, given the strong polarization of colonial Chiapas on ethnic lines, Viqueira shows the complexity of the divisions that emerged within the indigenous population of Chiapas in the course of this uprising and the need to understand the not always edifying conduct of both the rebels themselves and of the range of indigenous actors who opposed the rebellion in terms relevant to their historical context rather than our own preoccupations in the present. Although the sources do not enable us to determine all of the motivations behind the actions they record, they offer rare insights into rarely discussed aspects of violent confrontation, such as the way that some individuals within the rebel community sought to moderate the suffering of the ethnic enemies who had fallen under their power.
Carvalho’s study of the Cabanada rebellion and the ensuing “resistance” of an armed community led by the “stealer of slaves” Vicente de Paula, is set in the forest zone of the frontier of the states of Pernambuco and Alagoas more than a century after the Cancuc Rebellion. Here we are dealing with “popular” rebels whose access to land depended on their incorporation into the clientship networks of landowners, while the Indians of Jacuípe, who became the most “ferocious” of the Cabanos, had a long history of “collaboration,” not least in the destruction of the quilombo of Palmares in 1695. Yet the rebel community was to bring poor peasants, Indians and escaped slaves together, and what brought them together, Carvalho shows, was the transformation of local political arrangements after the exile of emperor Pedro I, for whose restoration both popular rebels and disadvantaged sections of the elite were in principle fighting, although for radically different reasons. Yet although the rebels were fighting against dispossession by a plantation economy now extending into a zone that had previously enjoyed a degree of protection, and even after the rebellion was defeated, continued to raid the sugar plantations from their forest redoubt in Richão do Mato, Carvalho shows that the movement did not represent a withdrawal from society but a continuing effort to intervene in the wider political system and change it. There is a clear parallel here between what Castro suggests was the perceived end of a colonial “pact” in the Bourbon period in Mexico and the war fought by the “people of the forests” against the “Jacobins” who deposed Pedro I.

The first section ends with Slenes’s exploration of the possible political meaning of a plot for a slave rebellion discovered by the authorities in 1848 in Rio de Janeiro state. He does so in the context of a broader argument that highlights the fact that it is necessary to talk about “slave societies” in the plural in Brazil, since the relations between slaves and masters differed between regions and over the course of time. Taking up the divergent positions on the history of Brazilian slavery (and ways in which it might be contrasted with that of the United States) that have continued to underpin contemporary debates about the desirability of affirmative action programs, Slenes shows how prospects for obtaining freedom and a social mobility that often involved former slaves becoming slave owners differed between small and large plantations in the southeast of Brazil, whilst developments through the later nineteenth and twentieth century dampened the hopes for a non-racialized conception and practice of citizenship that were bred in the relations between slaves and masters in the small holdings and the social world of freed slaves. His analysis thus concedes
that there is some force to the argument that Brazilian conditions could promote social divisions within the slave quarters and between slaves and free Afro-Brazilians, but demonstrates that the large plantations of the southeast never offered the same prospects for freedom to their slaves as the smaller farms, and that in this region the rebellious slave movements do not seem to reflect strong divisions between Africans and creoles and slaves and *libertos* found in Bahia. There is, however, a parallel with Bahia in the sense that enslaved Africans made use of their African cultural heritage in adapting themselves to the conditions they faced in their new homeland. Slenes explores the way in which cults of affliction that drew on a cultural patrimony that was widely dispersed in the region of African from which the labor force in his region was taken not only served as a means of building a common identity and matrix of social organization for the slave population but also reproduced the “governance” functions that they had possessed in Africa, leading Slenes to suggest that efforts to organize slave rebellions could be seen as a conscious and collective subaltern intervention in the ongoing politics of securing the definitive abolition of the Atlantic trade and ultimately slavery itself.

These chapters therefore lead us from the simple assumptions made by Scott about the necessary antagonisms between subalterns and their masters, and the pragmatics of overt rebellion versus “hidden transcripts” of “resistance,” towards efforts to understand why some subalterns “collaborate” while others do not, what shapes the differences that emerge within the ranks of subalterns themselves, what shapes the kind of “consciousness” that these actors develop in particular times and places, and what shapes the different kinds of relations that develop between subaltern and superordinate actors in different contexts. Answering these questions is central to addressing the broader question of the contribution that Amerindians and Africans can be said to have made to the shaping of these “new worlds.”

The second section of the book focuses on religious institutions and movements, so often relegated to epiphenomenal status in relation to class oppositions or treated or simply “reactionary.” Taking her cue from the way resistance scholarship opened up new spaces for taking the religious content of “popular subcultures of resistance” seriously, Pessar’s analysis of backlands millenarian movements in Brazil echoes the earlier emphasis of some of the contributors on the way that rebellion reflected the perceived breaking of established social pacts, but in a way that highlights not only the political changes that accompanied the republic transition in
Brazil, and the socio-economic changes that accompanied a growing capitalist transformation of the backlands, but also the ultramontane faction of the Catholic Church’s mid-nineteenth century efforts to “strip rural inhabitants of the symbols, identities and practices which had been sustained over the centuries in folk Catholicism.” Given that millenarian ideas had begun their social and political lives as ideas that churchmen fostered as “technologies of colonial rule,” the millenarian movements of the backlands represented a popular response to a crisis of hegemony brought about by changing elite projects, throwing once dominant ideas back in the face of elites that seemed to abandoned them in an effort to restore past principles of morality and economic and spiritual security by reconstituting heterodox institutions, roles and practices at the grassroots under the charismatic leadership of figures such as Antônio Conselheiro of Canudos and Padre Cicero of Juazeiro. As Pessar goes on to show, the historical irony of Brazilian millenarianism is that it starts off as an element in a hegemonic project, becomes subversive and subject to the most brutal repression as elite projects change, only to be re-appropriated in modern Brazilian history by the state, media and a Catholic Church facing increasingly competition from evangelicals as “socially progressive,” “cultural patrimony” or even a tourist resource. Although Pessar rejects the conclusion that this apparent “coming full circle” strips millenarianism of any remaining capacity to act as a discourse and practice of subaltern resistance and returns it to conformity with dominant class interests, she points out that a “constellation of identities, meanings and practices that afforded a culturally-appropriate tool kit for problem-solving thought and agency” in the 1800s and early 1900s was already appealing to a narrower segment of rural society by the 1930s and the era of Getúlio Vargas, when Pedro Batista established the community that she herself studied ethnographically in Santa Brigida. The religious dimensions of the movements are finding less and less echo in contemporary actors who still find them inspiring, since their original meaning derived from the hegemonic crisis of another era.

Although this latter theme also articulates well with other contributions to the volume that deal with the apparent contemporary “domestication” of popular movements and practices once regarded as subversive, Parés’s examination of the Afro-Brazilian religion Candomblé offers a particularly close complement to Pessar’s discussion because he argues that the “internal” perspective of Candomblé practitioners, to the extent to which they employ any explicit concept of “resistance”
at all, focuses on “conservation” and the idea of “not losing what one has rather than
winning what one does not have,” survival until today being premised on “the
mimetic behavior inherent in the transmission from one generation to the other.”
Although the field of Candomblé studies and modern Candomblé politics is marked
by sharp confrontations between “Afro-centric” positions that stress the survival of
traditions originating in the African past and “Creolist” positions that emphasize the
creative reconfiguration of a new hybrid religion with European and American as well
as African elements within Brazil, Parés notes that Candomblé’s cosmology seems to
reproduce “the semantics of ancestrality and tradition” central to the logic of African
religious systems. Nevertheless, Parés points to the way that historically Candomblé
has simultaneously acted as a space of subversive dissidence, along the lines
suggested by Slenes in this volume, noting that some of Bahia’s nineteenth century
slave revolts were initiated in terreiros, and as a space for negotiation of new spaces
in the wider social order, along the lines suggested by Monteiro. Part of the story of
Candomblé’s achievement of elite recognition, under politically conservative regimes
in the 1930s and again in the 1970s, concerns the emergence to public visibility of a
series of “elite terreiros” that emphasized the purity of Yoruba traditions as a “true
religion” free of magical and other unacceptably “dangerous” elements, which could
also be contrasted with “syncretic” Candomblé houses that the Africanized ones
accused of the commercialized pursuit of charlatanism as the touristic exploitation of
Bahia’s African cultural heritage intensified. Yet Black activists influenced by North
American Pan-Africanism drove a further move towards “re-Africanization” in the
form of a purging of Catholic elements in the 1980s, shifting a process of
“culturalization of religion” towards politicization of both culture and religion in the
1990s.

Although this activist appropriation of Candomblé, with its aim of
“ethnicizing” black identities, has to be regarded as distinct in nature from earlier state
appropriations of Candomblé for the electoral and economic purposes of conservative
white elites, Parés highlights the way his material demonstrates that the state itself
“should not necessarily be reduced to a monolithic, exclusive representation of the
dominant, not its recognition of Candomblé to a simple unidirectional movement from
top to bottom.” Members of the black movement in fact found it increasingly possible
to obtain positions within the state apparatus in the democratic 1990s, especially
through the Palmares Foundation and its new “juridical-formal” definition of the
quilombo, discussed in greater detail in Leite’s chapter. Yet the new benefits that Candomblé could now secure from the state, including the official registration of some terreiros as national cultural heritage sites, continued to be concentrated on the “elite” terreiros, and the tutelage of Candomblé by the state, NGOs and black activists has reproduced a situation in which their signs and symbols are “re-mediated for consumerism and political purposes.” This leads Parés to ask where the “silent majority” of less publicly visible Candomblé houses now stand, and his hypothesis is that it may well be in the continuing “apolitical” practice of less respectable religious traditions within the terreiros frequented only by poorer Bahians, what Sahlins calls “the resistance of culture,” that we may find “the nourishing ground for future challenges to today’s authorities,” grounded in a specifically religious logic and independent of individual or collective political self-awareness. At this level the battle is with the expanding Evangelical Churches, which have themselves appropriated some of the symbolic practices with which Candomblé practitioners resist the hardships of their daily life with the aid of the gods.

Both the papers on Brazil in this section highlight the need to understand how particular religions maintain their social bases and adjust to the challenges of rival faiths as well as secularizing forces. Meyer’s discussion of varieties of Catholic resistance to the Mexican post-revolutionary state’s measures against the Church from the mid-1920s onwards also takes up this theme by stressing the importance of understanding the social rootedness of the Catholic Church as the key to understanding its durability and adaptability to changing historical circumstances. His contribution takes the form of a “mea culpa” for past sins of analytical omission that resulted from his past focus on the armed rebellion of the Cristeros and the regions that produced the militant forms of resistance that he dubs Widerstand, some of which became foci of further armed violence in the 1930s after Church and State reached the agreement that brought the Cristiada to an end in 1929. The focus in this paper is on the pacific, civic and “sociological” forms of resistance, Resistenz, that were the rule rather than exception in the five northern and four southern states of the Federation between 1926 and 1929. This is not to say that Resistenz did not occur in states where armed conflict was intense (as Schell’s chapter further demonstrates) and Meyer shows that marginal pockets of Widerstand can be found even in states such as Oaxaca in which there was a general absence of violent conflict or serious interference with Catholic devotions or education, thanks to a remarkable but, as he
shows, far from unique process of compromise between civil, military and ecclesiastical authorities. Meyer’s comparative reflections on different local and regional experiences of religious conflict between 1926 to 1938 cover a wide range of variables, from the socio-geographical to the vexing question of the role of individual personalities, given that some apparently “reasonable men” failed to stave off armed conflicts whilst military commanders who did not appear particularly “soft” in one context proved so in another. Although he argues that much further research still needs to be done to answer the new questions that emerge from this comparative framework, he points to the importance of recognizing how the actions of a weak central government were constrained by the subterranean but powerful forces of popular piety and the equally silent tendency of local elites not to implement orders from above that they outwardly “respected.”

Schell’s chapter on the Union of Mexican Catholic Women (UDCM) continues the theme of taking the motivational force of religious beliefs and a deeply felt sense of religious persecution seriously, but adds a gendered dimension to the discussion. The “ladies” who are the chief protagonists of Schell’s study did not seek radical changes in gender roles or the class differentiation reflected in their own self-image as the decorous women who “counseled peaceful protest … while servants in the street attacked police and fire-fighters.” Yet even if class, along with projection of respectable images of motherhood and women’s “natural roles,” offered these women a measure of protection or at least of mitigation in punishment, and Schell also offers further examples of quiet compromises that lessened the impact of anti-clerical legislation, she shows that these socially conservative middle-class women did take substantial risks, could suffer serious consequences as a result, and were seen as directly challenging power structures by their opponents. In this sense, she argues, they fully deserve to be included in a study of resistance. Furthermore, in their desires to “serve for something” through an activism that highlighted women’s contribution to society and the nation, these unlikely rebels, resisting religious persecution and sexually provocative dress-styles alike, were also acting against their marginalization by gender from the public, political sphere. In this respect, their actions did contribute to social change, and Schell explores some interesting parallels between Mexico and Brazil in this regard. Indeed, she suggests in conclusion, UDCM “resistance” was perhaps a little too successful from the point of view of the Church hierarchy, which
re-imposed clerical control by making this lay organization part of Catholic Action in 1929.

The third section of the book consists of a series of papers that interrogate the possible meanings of “resistance” in the contemporary world. Extending the discussion begun in Pessar and Parés’s contributions, we have further reflections in these contributions on the implications of the fact that states themselves seemed to have opened up new spaces for the official recognition of certain subaltern identities and a “politics of difference,” coupled with a focus on the emergence of “new actors,” amongst the subaltern sectors of society and external to them, in the form of NGOs. Our contributors reflect further on the variety of subaltern tactics and strategies, including the uses that some make of the law, and on the complexities of subaltern politics, providing us with a broad range of case studies with which to explore both the continuing value of ideas drawn from classical resistance theory and the areas where new thinking seems to be necessary.

Zárate analyzes the case of the Unión de Comuneros “Emiliano Zapata” (UCEZ), an independent rural movement that emerged in Western Mexico in the 1970s, under the charismatic leadership of the self-taught lawyer Efrén Capiz. This was an era in which “peasant” (campesino) social movements were still the principle protagonists in the Mexican countryside, but the UCEZ anticipated the cultural politics of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation in Chiapas by promoting the idea that people who saw themselves as mestizo campesinos should re-identify with their indigenous ancestry. Although Zárate reminds us that selection of “ethnic identity” can often be read in purely instrumentalist terms as a strategy for advancing claims to resources, she uses ethnographic material drawn from a study of three UCEZ communities with different histories and social characteristics to demonstrate that it is difficult to draw a definitive line between instrumental and other kinds of motivations, highlighting ways in which the UCEZ’s program of “building community” and challenging the stigmas habitually attached to “Indian” identity was experienced as empowering by those who joined the movement. Taking up Scott’s insight that “the struggle to define the present is a struggle to define the past,” she explores the political work done by counter-hegemonic constructions of history in the anti-colonial and anti-imperialist discourse of the UCEZ whilst emphasizing the ambivalence that persists within the UCEZ “bases” as a consequence of past experiences. Her analysis continues the discussion of the previous section in
examining issues of gender and how popular religiosity complicated the secular community-building projects of the UCEZ, just as it had complicated the projects of radical agrarian reformers in the 1920s and 1930s, and links to other contributions that follow through its exploration of the movement’s struggle to achieve public legitimacy and the ambiguous relationships that a militancy that sought to use the law to further its agrarian demands established with political parties and state authorities, despite its increasing convergence with the neo-Zapatista movement.

Returning to a theme broached by Monteiro, De la Peña analyzes recent processes of ethnogenesis in the Sierra of Manantlán, also in Western Mexico, a situation in which local indigenous identity is shaped by an acute sense of being victims of dispossession and racist aggression by mestizos. Ironically, this led a group within the community of Ayotitlán to abandon efforts to recover lost lands as communal property in the 1960s, accepting an alliance with the National Peasant Confederation, a campesino political identity, and a successful petition to the government to grant them a land reform ejido as the most practical solution to the community’s problems. De la Peña shows how the failure of that strategy to end a situation of ethnic discrimination and restrain illegal logging enabled the older authority system of the Council of Elders to re-emerge to challenge the new authorities politically, with the support of a range of external actors. Ranging, over the course of time, from left-wing activists and liberation theology clerics to university teams developing environmental conservation projects and social projects aimed at marginalized groups and the “rescue” of cultural traditions, the entry of external actors into this scenario was facilitated by its particular local dynamics but clearly correlated with broader social and political trends. He shows that whilst contemporary “indigenous culture” as knowledge and practice has to some extent been shaped by the work of the community’s supporters, it has not been created ex nihilo, not simply because there are continuities with the past that permit us to apply ideas such as Sahlins’s “the resistance of culture” or Edward Spicer’s idea of a “system of persistent identity” to this case, but also because today’s collective identity is a product of a meaningful series of shifts in political relations that make it meaningful to talk about the resignification of history and local culture in terms of more active and creative forms of “resistance.”

Nevertheless, the outcome of historical shifts in the “complex field of vertical and horizontal relations – of alliance and contradiction – in which conceptions of
internal and external, communal and national are elaborated” is not a single set of
“subaltern subjectivities” but, as De la Peña shows, a multiplicity of different
positions. They include those of actors who still defend the CNC model and
commercial deals with loggers, others who favor conservation and indigenous
community self-management on terms that keep public resources flowing, Zapatista
sympathizers, and women who find their personal empowerment in indigenous
medical practice and New Age terminology.

As De la Peña points out, interesting points of convergence emerge between
shifting visions of the indigenous community in Mexico and those that have marked
the vicissitudes of the quilombo in Brazil, the subject of the next chapter by Leite,
who has been actively involved in the land titling struggles of the community of
Casca in Rio Grande do Sul, in the south of Brazil. Portuguese colonial legislation
painted the quilombo, defined as any assembly of more than five blacks, as subversive
by associating it with imminent slave rebellion, while the use of the term quilombo to
denote communities formed by freed or runaway slaves, most famously exemplified
by Palmares, has turned it into an icon for the historical struggles of Afro-Brazilians
during and after slavery. Leite shows that as a “trans-historical” concept quilombo has
come to denote “resistance” in a wide variety of senses of “non-acceptance of
different kinds of domination,” giving it symbolic value in different phases of the
development of the black movement. After the Constituent Assembly of 1988,
however, the quilombo gradually acquired a new formal-juridical meaning as part of a
pact between state and society to remedy the historical injustices of mid-nineteenth
century land laws by granting communal land rights to the disenfranchised black rural
communities that previous regimes had made invisible. Leite shows how tensions
arise from the judicial assumption that reparation has been made to those who have
managed to “resist” by surviving to the present on the margins of society and are now
finally incorporated into the nation, and the danger that old forms of domination may
be reproduced in the institutionalized quilombo. But she also shows how the
polysemic metaphorical quality of the quilombo continues to fortify new kinds of
movements and demands, especially in urban contexts, whilst frustration with the
slow legal progress of many claims and the opposition of big landowners and
agribusiness has created a climate in which the quilombola movement has taken more
direct actions to press its demands and faced police repression as a consequence.
In this “post-utopian quilombo” context, it seems that rights cannot actually be obtained without reasserting the activism of the trans-historical quilombo in new ways. This is one of the issues that Hita explores in analyzing the grassroots politics of a poor urban neighborhood of Salvador created by a land invasion in the 1980s, building its very identity around its original “resistance” to eviction (supported by a left-leaning Catholic NGO) and continuing “resistance” to official impositions and marginalization despite the development of more cordial relations with public power. Some of the young black people involved in a series of cultural groups that have recently emerged as “new political actors” in this community explicitly embrace the idea of declaring their bairro an “urban quilombo.” Yet as Hita demonstrates, despite their clear “ethnic” consciousness, links to the militant black movement and tendency to critique the capitalist system, there are many ambiguities in the positions that these young people adopt with regard to the state, public-private partnerships and the values of a global consumer society that seem to take the edge off their militancy yet do not erase it completely or amount to cooptation by “the system” either. As she shows by comparing the youth groups with some of the religious associations that play an important part in community politics and the main protagonist in its affairs, the Residents’ Council, despite the existence in this case of the same kind of “polyphony” of subaltern voices that Zárate and De la Peña identify, and a considerable amount of mutual internal criticism on the part of these different community actors, Bairro da Paz has managed to maintain a degree of collective coherence in its negotiations with public authorities. Although the networks associated with Catholic NGOs and the Residents’ Council are clearly the strongest, more marginal actors, such as women associated with Bairro da Paz’s non-elite terreiros, have not been excluded, and although Hita shares the concerns of other contributors about the negative impacts of political clientelism, and the de-radicalizing potential of some NGO interventions and neoliberal approaches to managing “participation” and the politics of difference, she points out that consciousness of these problems on the part of community activists might be one way of diagnosing what is “new” about today’s “resistance” on the part of a community that has built its very identity around that concept.

The final two chapters in this section return to Mexican examples. Baitenmann continues the discussion of the implications of factionalism within subaltern populations by examining how campesinos use the new agrarian courts created after the constitutional changes that ended land redistribution in 1992, thereby changing the
focus on whether peasants would or would not “resist” neoliberal agrarian restructuring projects that dominated earlier debates on the land-titling process and other aspects of the reform. She takes her cue from the Roseberry’s observation that the existence of land conflicts between peasant communities and haciendas or peasant communities and the state should not blind us to the fact that today and in the past some of the most violent conflicts have occurred within and between indigenous and peasant communities themselves. In using the post-1992 agrarian institutions to pursue ongoing conflicts over land, peasant groups or individuals ask the courts to issue an amparo, a legal recourse originally introduced as a protection against legal and procedural abuses by the state. Although the amparo was of great importance to landlords in the early years of the land reform process, it can now be an instrument by which one part of the state determines that another part of the state did not treat peasant claimants correctly. Since the grant of an amparo effectively returns a situation to the status quo ante, Baitenmann sees this as corresponding to the type of “resistance” that Pessar describes as being about “keeping what one has rather than winning what one does not have” but since the struggle in this case is about preserving access to land, the stakes are high and contention over this resource strong and often violent. Furthermore, local factionalism also reflects the complexity of the cross-cutting alliances that can be forged between different local actors and different interests within and departments of the state apparatus, and “resistance” to higher or external powers is often itself productive of subaltern factionalism. One illustration of this is the case of the La Parota hydro-electric dam project, in which the existence of a substantial minority of comuneros willing to accept the expropriation of their lands tended to go unnoticed due to activist success, despite its significance for understanding ongoing violence.

Gutmann’s essay takes off from precisely this latter kind of problem by critiquing the notion of subaltern agency that has dominated both resistance and social movement theory. Even if there are virtues in not painting subalterns as hapless and passive, and strong arguments in favor of arguing that protests and defiance of existing power relations have changed history – alongside collaboration and accommodation – an exaggerated celebration of “popular agency” seems to have left us bereft of theoretical tools to analyze not only those who try to resist but fail but also the frequency, even in moments when there is protest on the part of some, of compliance, collaboration, apathy and passivity on the part of others. Using ethnographic examples from a squatter settlement in Mexico City with a long history
of activism, including activism by women, and Oaxaca, scene in 2006 of a major mobilization against an unpopular state government that brought together a plurality of dissident social and political forces in the Popular Assembly of the Peoples of Oaxaca, violently repressed by a federal government police action, Gutmann critiques the political as well as theoretical positions that have dominated the academic field of resistance theory. He proposes a more dialectical approach that reflects the inspiration of Gramsci as well as anthropological analyses of rituals of protest that maintain rather than undermine existing power relations. Arguing that if resistance theories become no more than a means of opposing utopian dreams of worlds free from poverty, racism, and militarization, they are part of the problem rather than its solution, Gutmann explores the way his own concept of “compliant defiance” can provide an ethnographically grounded framework for reintegrating the analysis of covert and sporadic acts of everyday resistance and overt organized protests, whilst tackling the need to understand the dialectics of mobilization, apathy, resignation and self-blame.

Since this introduction was written by an anthropologist, it is fitting that the book ends with an analytical essay by a historian. Alan Knight reflects on the extent to which theoretical arguments and practical knowledge distilled from the contributions to the book can serve as the basis for consolidating the place of resistance as a concept in our tool kit as social scientists and historians. Deftly wielding Ockham’s razor through a thicket of crucial issues, ranging from whether resistance needs to be intentional, how low-key resistance may come to take more overt and challenging collective forms, through vexed questions of ideology and “thick” and “thin” false consciousness, and on to the relations between scholarly responsibility and political commitment, Knight concludes that resistance can and should remain central to understanding “power laden” situations and processes, providing that we maintain a focus on subalterns and recognize that their actions are not always heroic, perspicacious or noble.


**Bibliography**


