

BOOK REVIEW ESSAY

Indigenous and Black Autonomies and Resistance

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This essay reviews the following works:

Indigenous Struggles for Autonomy: The Caribbean Coast of Nicaragua. Edited by Luciano Baracco. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2018. Pp. vi + 239. \$105.00 hardcover, \$99.50 e-book. ISBN: 9781498558815.

Aprendizajes del movimiento zapatista: De la insurgencia armada a la autonomía popular. By Lia Pinheiro Barbosa and Peter Michael Rosset. Buenos Aires: CLACSO (Colección En Movimiento); San Cristóbal de Las Casas, Mexico: El Colegio de la Frontera Sur (ECOSUR), 2023. Pp. 152. Paperback, digital. ISBN: 9789878135694.

Colonialismo, comunidad, y capital: Pensar el despojo, pensar América Latina. Edited by Santiago Bastos Amigo and Edgars Martínez Navarrete. Quito: Religación Press, 2023. Pp. 419. paperback, digital. ISBN: 9789942708007.

Oaxaca Resurgent: Indigeneity, Development, and Inequality in Twentieth-Century Mexico. By A. S. Dillingham. Redwood City, CA: Stanford University Press, 2021. Pp. xiv + 254. \$30.00 paperback, \$90.00 hardcover. ISBN: 9781503627840.

Autonomías y autogobierno en la América diversa. Edited by Miguel González, Araceli Burguete Cal y Mayor, José Marimán, Pablo Ortiz-T., and Ritsuko Funako. Quito: Editorial Universitaria Abya-Yala, 2021. Pp. 692. Paperback, digital. ISBN: 9789978105504.

Black and Indigenous Resistance in the Americas: From Multiculturalism to Racist Backlash. By Juliet Hooker. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2020. Pp. x + 330. \$42.99 paperback; \$121.00 hardcover; \$40.50 e-book. ISBN: 9781793615527.

Pensar las autonomías: Experiencias de autogestión, poder popular y autonomía. Edited by Alicia Hopkins and César Enrique Pineda. Mexico City: Bajo Tierra, 2021. Pp. 458. Paperback, digital. ISBN: 9786079675172.

Indigenous and Afro-descendant peoples of the Americas have been resisting oppression for over five hundred years, and since the last few decades of the twentieth century, their struggles have increasingly embraced the demand for autonomy. These movements are heterogeneous, but there appear to be some common causal factors behind their upsurge.¹

¹ On the rise of Indigenous and Afro-descendant movements in Latin America, see Deborah J. Yashar, *Contesting Citizenship in Latin America: The Rise of Indigenous Movements and the Postliberal Challenge* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Kwame Dixon, “Afro-Latin Social Movements in Latin America and the Caribbean,” *Oxford Research Encyclopedias*, January 30, 2020, <https://oxfordre.com/politics/display/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228637>.

The return of formal electoral democracy to much of the region since the 1980s opened space for organizing yet fell short in delivering substantive gains to historically excluded groups, while neoliberal policies ravaged the poor. In particular, the freeing of private capital accumulation on a global scale gave the green light to extractivist investment megaprojects at the expense of local community rights to land, territory, and subsistence. In more recent decades, the neoliberal variant of multiculturalism has sparked new debates over the politics of recognition while failing to address the racialized components of rising populist discourses. The works reviewed here are part of a growing body of literature by scholar-activists on historical and contemporary struggles of Indigenous and Afro-descendant peoples for rights, dignity, justice, and self-determination.

Racial capitalism and the state

The volume edited by Juliet Hooker, *Black and Indigenous Resistance in the Americas*, is a collaborative project of the Red de Acción e Investigación Anti-Racista (RAIAR), a network of seven organizations from across the Americas, including the US-based Movement for Black Lives and the Mexican Colectivo para Eliminar el Racismo (COPERA). The compilation includes eight chapters by prominent anti-racist scholar-activists who adopt a lens of racial politics and anticolonialism. They argue that current Black and Indigenous struggles are “defined by the exhaustion of neoliberal multiculturalism and the apparent futility of a strategy focused mainly on demanding rights from the state,” given that state policies are characterized by repression and “violent extractivist development policies” (11). This theme of whether and how movements should engage with the state runs through all the works reviewed here.

Among this volume’s notable qualities are that it examines struggles across the hemisphere, from the Movement for Black Lives in the United States to the Mapuche resistance in Chile, and applies a common analytical framework to both Black and Indigenous movements. An opening chapter by Charles R. Hale and Leith Mullings lays out the central argument shared by the authors of the seven cases. Using a Gramscian analysis to dissect the hegemonic ideology of racial capitalism, they argue that post–World War II “progressive neoliberalism” and movements for Black and Indigenous rights (i.e., claims on the state) have largely failed to address historical problems of structural racism, or indeed the needs of majority populations of the Americas in a period of sharpening and highly racialized global inequalities.² Moreover, they suggest that this failure, coupled with the tepid multicultural turn of the 1990s, has generated a backlash in the form of a hemispheric “racial retrenchment,” alternately expressed in either the virulent racial hatred exemplified by Trump and Bolsonaro or the “liberal dissimulations and affirmations of the ‘post-racial’ character of the current era” (33). They argue that because of the “productivist and state-centered bias” of the left (38) and the state’s historical anti-Black and anti-Indigenous orientation (typically expressed in ideologies of

001.0001/acrefore-9780190228637-e-1725. For analysis of how these heterogeneous autonomías (*autonomías abigarradas*) emerged from the uneven social formations produced by colonialism in Latin America, see Araceli Burguete Cal y Mayor, “La autonomía indígena: La polisemia de un concepto. A modo de prólogo,” in *Movimientos indígenas y autonomías en América Latina: Escenarios de disputa y horizontes de posibilidad*, ed. Pavel C. López Flores and Luciana García Guerreiro (Buenos Aires: CLACSO, 2018), 11–21. Burguete Cal y Mayor makes the case that autonomy represents a “new paradigm” in the decolonization struggles of Indigenous peoples of Latin America, breaking with the paradigms of assimilationism and multiculturalism.

² The phrase “progressive neoliberalism” is from Nancy Fraser, “The End of Progressive Neoliberalism,” *Dissent* 64, no. 2 (Spring 2017): 130–134. She uses it to refer to Bill Clinton and Tony Blair’s revision of the New Deal into “a new alliance of entrepreneurs, suburbanites, new social movements, and youth, all proclaiming their modern, progressive bona fides by embracing diversity, multiculturalism, and women’s rights” while courting Wall Street and embracing deindustrialization.

mestizaje), some resistance movements are shifting their focus away from the state and the discourse of rights and toward what Mapuche activists call a *rupturista* stance of radical refusal. The focus in this volume on racial ideologies makes an important contribution to understanding the tensions between transgressive, de facto autonomy and those strategies that seek to take advantage of the openings that states have been forced to make by mobilizations from below.

Notwithstanding the commonalities of the movements examined in *Black and Indigenous Resistance in the Americas*, the national specificities are also revealing. A chapter on Mapuche resistance (Jaime Antimil Caniupan, Héctor Nahuelpan Moreno, and Jakelin Curaqueo Mariano) highlights the distinctive process of settler-colonialism in Chile, arguing that “colonialism is a form of historical, global, and permanent violence” (70). In contrast to Mexico, where *mestizaje* was woven into the dominant mythology of the nation-state and even the Zapatistas identify as both Indigenous and Mexican, the Mapuche response to ongoing colonial violence and dispossession has been radical territorial autonomy and self-government that rejects state recognition and seeks to recover full control over their ancestral Andean territory of Wallmapu.

Other cases suggest a more ambiguous impact of multiculturalism, such as Colombia (discussed in a chapter by Roosbelinda Cárdenas, Charo Mina Rojas, Eduardo Restrepo, and Eliana Antonio Rosero), where the 1991 Constitution formally recognized rights of Black communities as an ethnic group but where actual territorial rights are undermined by armed actors, cartels, and extractive industries driving continual displacement. These intertwined forces of the state, capital, and more irregular violent actors enforce colonial stratifications in new configurations that Shannon Speed has referred to in other contexts as “neoliberal multicriminalism.”³ A chapter on Maya Achi resistance in Guatemala (Rigoberto Ajcalón Choy, Aileen Ford, and Irma A. Velásquez Nimatuj) examines the paradoxes of multiculturalism, which opened some space for judicial and educational access and recognition of cultural claims but failed to dismantle structural racism (including gendered inequality) and continues to block economic rights to territory and resources, as well as a full recognition of civil and political rights that would challenge oligarchic concentrations of power. A chapter on Black women’s political mobilizations in Brazil from 1986 to 2018 (Luciane O. Rocha), seen through the lens of the *Marcha das Mulheres Negras*, shows how the 2016 institutional coup d’état that removed President Dilma Rousseff left the movement without a state interlocutor. Pamela Calla’s contribution on Bolivia argues that the model of neo-extractivism pursued by the plurinational state continued to marginalize women, LGBTQ+ people, Afro-descendant organizations, lowland Indigenous groups, and others. Mariana Mora and Jaime García Leyva’s study in Guerrero, Mexico, examines the racist repression of Indigenous teachers and a series of state educational reforms that reinforced racial hierarchies under new guises, but it also spotlights an innovative anti-racist pedagogical project of a group of Indigenous educators from the Montaña region of the state. Leith Mullings’s final case study on the US Movement for Black Lives (M4BL) argues that racism is a fundamental element of capitalism, tracing the racialized impact of neoliberal policies and the War on Drugs and the myth of a postracial society, as well as the new repertoires of resistance triggered by rising awareness of racialized policing and “global apartheid.”

Hooker and her colleagues offer much food for thought about the interconnections of neoliberal capitalism, the multicultural turn since the late twentieth century, and the emerging racist backlash across the Americas. All the scholar-activists in this compilation are deeply engaged in the question of the politics of recognition by the state and whether

³ Shannon Speed, “Neoliberal Multicriminalism and the Enduring Settler State,” in *Incarcerated Stories: Indigenous Women Migrants and Violence in the Settler-Capitalist State* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2019), 112–119.

multiculturalism is more of a trap or an opening for anti-racist and anticolonial mobilizing. The challenge the authors have set for themselves as an activist collaborative, extending beyond this book, is how to distill the lessons of their research into effective strategies of resistance.

Luciano Baracco's edited work *Indigenous Struggles for Autonomy: The Caribbean Coast of Nicaragua* also examines Afro-descendant and Indigenous struggles in an integral fashion, but it focuses on one country case study across time to consider how those populations have interacted with the state. This longitudinal approach brings into focus the continuities and discontinuities of colonial or neocolonial state formations, varieties of regimes and policies, and the implications of the Nicaraguan Atlantic Coast experience for autonomy struggles.

In contrast to the edited volume by Hooker and colleagues, which revolves around the construction of a shared theoretical framework, the authors in Baracco's compilation reflect more diversity of interpretation of the Nicaraguan experience. Historical chapters by Baracco and by Eric Rodrigo Meringer interrogate the conventional narrative of an Anglo affinity established during the economic boom times of the US-owned companies from the late nineteenth through mid-twentieth centuries, which supposedly fueled *costeños'* lingering rejection of the Hispanic nation-state. A more complex picture emerges of the ways the neocolonial economy fostered ethnic divisions and ambivalence among Miskitu, Creole, and other groups about autonomy vis-à-vis powerful economic actors and the state. Baracco's chapter on the first period of Sandinista government traces the confluence, rupture, and reconciliation between the Sandinistas' class-based, anti-imperialist nationalism and autonomist impulses. Chapter authors differ somewhat on the extent to which the negotiation of Nicaragua's watershed 1987 autonomy statute brought concrete advances for Indigenous and Afro-descendant (Creole) populations in terms of self-government and communal land rights. Yet they generally concur that "the autonomy process took a regional administrative form dominated by nonindigenous institutions and formal political parties" that "soon came to resemble a divisive quagmire of legal disputes, patrimonial politics, and voter apathy" (71). Joshua L. Mayer's chapter on the contemporary Chinese-funded Grand Canal megaproject underscores the way this negotiated, regional autonomy model of administrative devolution fails to empower its constituents to resist powerful outside political and economic interests. Yet in one hopeful aspect, "the construction of territorial autonomy emerges from, and is complemented by, acts of autonomy in daily and intimate life" (109), a message of bottom-up struggle underscored in Dolores Figueroa Romero and Arelly Barbeyto's chapter on the social activism of women in the negotiation of peaceful resolution of conflict.⁴

Indigenous Struggles for Autonomy: The Caribbean Coast of Nicaragua sheds light on an iconic autonomy process that produced a significant political-administrative reorganization of the state. Analysis of the shortcomings of this model might have been enhanced by situating the Nicaraguan case in a more explicitly comparative framework with other autonomy movements. More of a focus on racial construction would also be helpful in clarifying the ways the authors at times seem to use terms interchangeably, such as *Indigenous* and *Afro-descendant*, or *Indianist* and *autonomy* movements.

Heterogeneous autonomies

Lia Pinheiro Barbosa and Peter Michael Rosset's insightful *Aprendizajes del movimiento zapatista* is part of a CLACSO series of monographs on Latin American social movements

⁴ This grassroots perspective on the autonomy process in Nicaragua can be seen in Jennifer Goett, *Black Autonomy: Race, Gender, and Afro-Nicaraguan Activism* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2016).

and rebellions called Colección en Movimiento.⁵ The Zapatista movement evolved in complex ways, from the intertwining of campesino and Indigenous organizing initiatives of the 1970s with the clandestine Fuerzas de Liberación Nacional (FLN) as a precursor to the 1983 formation of the Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (EZLN), through the dramatic 1994 uprising in Chiapas, Mexico, and the ensuing autonomy project.⁶ The authors' analysis carefully parses the concept and varieties of autonomy, identifying Zapatista autonomy as *de facto* (rather than *de jure* or negotiated within existing legal-institutional frameworks), rooted not just in a particular ethnic identity but in the political and territorial existence of the movement's support base communities. From the beginning, the Zapatistas demanded cultural, economic, and political autonomy, including a new federal pact that would replace Mexican centralism with self-determination and grassroots self-government by Indigenous communities and municipalities. This is a quite different model from the regional administrative model of autonomy in Nicaragua, with the attendant "limits that multicultural recognition politics impose" (Miguel González in Baracco, 77).

Barbosa and Rosset also note that, although movement participants are primarily Indigenous Maya, the Zapatistas' is a radical autonomy, calling for an emancipatory praxis that is horizontal and participatory and not tied to a specific ethnic group. Rather, it "has a popular, community, or class base" cutting across ethnicities (130). In a particularly interesting discussion, the authors delve into the tensions and convergences between Indigenous and campesino autonomies, suggesting that the community-based Zapatista model taps into long traditions of agrarian radicalism and noting the Zapatista emphasis on agroecology and the rebuilding of a local peasant economy.⁷ They also highlight the emancipatory everyday praxis—including local self-governance and administration of justice, a new generation of youth and women serving as health and education and agroecology promoters, and collective production aimed at self-sufficiency—that has created a collective social subject whose power is interwoven in the community fabric. From this perspective, autonomy is a transformative process rather than a product.

The Zapatista autonomy project is of course not exempt from challenges. At the national level, President López Obrador's grandiosely self-proclaimed Fourth Transformation (4T) of Mexico has sown divisions in Indigenous territories over extractive and infrastructural megaprojects while seemingly re-creating a populist version of the dominant party-state, and Zapatista initiatives to build broader alliances have had limited success. The intertwining of capital, the state, and transnational criminal organizations is forcing autonomy movements in Mexico to seek new ways of defending land and territory. In a series of communiqués in late 2023, the Zapatistas

⁵ For the complete series, see <https://libreria.clacso.org/coleccion.php?c=48>.

⁶ On the origins of the Zapatista movement, see Neil Harvey, *The Chiapas Rebellion: The Struggle for Land and Democracy* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998). For analysis of its evolution on the thirtieth anniversary of the uprising, see the special issue "EZLN," *Revista de la Ciudad de México*, nos. 903–904 (2023): <https://www.revista delauniversidad.mx/download/4697ea55-66b9-481f-bb50-7135fcc68ff0?filename=eeln>. On the practice of autonomy within Zapatista communities, see Bruno Baronnet, Mariana Mora Bayo, and Richard Stahler-Sholk, eds., *Luchas "muy otras": Zapatismo y autonomía en las comunidades indígenas de Chiapas* (Mexico City: UAM-Xochimilco, CIESAS, and UNACH, 2011), https://www.casadelibrosabiertos.uam.mx/contenido/contenido/Libroelectronico/luchas_muy_otras.pdf; Mariana Mora, *Kuxlejal Politics: Indigenous Autonomy, Race, and Decolonizing Research in Zapatista Communities* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2017).

⁷ On the relation between Indigenous and campesino autonomy, see Víctor Bretón, Miguel González, Blanca Rubio, and Leandro Vergara-Camus, "Peasant and Indigenous Autonomy before and after the Pink Tide in Latin America," *Journal of Agrarian Change* 22, no. 3 (2022): 547–575; Lia Pinheiro Barbosa, Oscar Soto, María Isabel González, and Edgars Martínez Navarrete, "Autonomías territoriales indígenas y campesinas en América Latina: Tensiones, disputas y avances frente a los gobiernos de derecha," in *Estado, democracia y movimientos sociales: Persistencias y emergencias en el siglo XXI*, ed. María Fernanda Sañudo Pazos et al. (Buenos Aires: CLACSO, 2023), 463–511.

announced an internal restructuring, including an apparent decentralization of their self-governing structures. They also replaced the collective tenancy by Zapatista communities on land recovered from estate owners after the 1994 uprising with the “nonproperty” concept of the commons, in which the use of those lands would be negotiated and shared with other Indigenous and campesino claimants regardless of political affiliation.⁸ As the Zapatistas explained it, the restructuring was both a proactive rectification of internal problems, such as the emergence of unintended hierarchies in their old multilevel self-government, and a defensive adjustment of their autonomy to the changing environment of external threats.

This slender book does not attempt to document the entire history of the movement. However, the authors draw on their extensive experience in Chiapas to distill the critical analytical lessons of Zapatismo and the innovative qualities that continue to make it emblematic of Indigenous autonomy thirty years after the 1994 uprising.

Other Indigenous mobilizations for self-determination in Mexico have long roots predating the Zapatistas, in complex interaction and tension with the state, particularly in Oaxaca, which has the country’s largest proportion of native peoples. A. S. Dillingham’s *Oaxaca Resurgent* is a thoughtful and well-researched historical interpretation of the history of the struggles of Indigenous peoples in postrevolutionary Mexico and of the state’s shifting strategies to absorb and mold them into the official narrative of national identity. In addition to oral histories, the author draws on archives and intelligence files declassified in 2002 during the Fox administration and subsequently closed, offering the rare opportunity of seeing like a state. Chapter 1 follows teams of economists and anthropologists sent to “modernize” the Mixteca region of Oaxaca after World War II. Chapter 2 focuses on a Mixtec-Spanish bilingual educational radio program broadcast by the Instituto Nacional Indigenista (INI) to remote communities in the region. Chapter 3 examines a technocratic scheme to relocate Oaxaca’s highland Indigenous population southward toward the coastal plains. Chapter 4 evaluates a reformist period of *indigenista* policy under the Echeverría administration that included professional teacher training for Indigenous youth. Chapter 5 follows the struggle to democratize the local teachers’ union, Sección 22. Chapter 6 explores the contradictions of state-sponsored multiculturalism, as educators and policymakers attempted to institutionalize anticolonial and bilingual pedagogies.

Fascinating oral histories bring this account to life with detailed portraits of *indigenista* intellectuals and teachers. What emerges is a nuanced picture of Indigenous peoples not as passive objects of developmentalist and assimilationist policies but as diverse and active agents whose engagement and negotiation challenged and shaped those policies in unanticipated ways. From the early twentieth century, when Mexico’s first secretary of education José Vasconcelos launched the first large-scale program of rural education, imbued with his homogenizing notion of the *raza cósmica* (mestizo “cosmic race”), schools were central to the hegemonic project of constructing postrevolutionary national identity. Yet whatever the neocolonial impetus of *indigenista* institutions such as INI, they trained generations of Indigenous youth as bilingual teachers; and various reformist and dissident currents from below pushed the boundaries of reform beyond the institutional control of the PRI, among them the Coalición de Maestros y Promotores Indígenas de Oaxaca (CMPIO) and later the breakaway teachers’ union, the Coordinadora Nacional de Trabajadores de la Educación (CNTE).

⁸ EZLN, “Novena parte: La nueva estructura de la autonomía zapatista,” <https://enlacezapatista.ezln.org.mx/2023/11/12/novena-parte-la-nueva-estructura-de-la-autonomia-zapatista/>; and “Vigésima y última parte: El común y la no propiedad,” <https://enlacezapatista.ezln.org.mx/2023/12/20/vigesima-y-ultima-parte-el-comun-y-la-no-propiedad/>, *Enlace Zapatista*, November 12 and December 20, 2023.

Dillingham argues that the Echeverría administration of the 1970s in particular opened space through reforms including expanded public spending on education and rural development, and a decolonial, Third Worldist posture that brought leading critics of *indigenista* policy into Indigenous development initiatives (96–98). The author notes the incompatibility of this progressive nationalism with Echeverría's role in the 1968 Tlatelolco student massacre (100–101) but could have put more emphasis on Mexico's Dirty War against radical dissidents. Although the timeline of this book ends with the 2006 Oaxaca uprising, the contradictory face of Mexico's "perfect dictatorship" includes efforts to stamp out the *escuelas normales rurales* (rural normal schools) that had long served as crucibles for rural and Indigenous radicalism, exemplified in the Ayotzinapa repression of 2014.⁹

One of the most provocative discussions in *Oaxaca Resurgent* revolves around the potential and shortcomings of multiculturalism and the contested politics of recognition.¹⁰ While acknowledging that "neoliberal multiculturalism appeared as a model of full-spectrum governance and market capture" and risks relegating Indigenous peoples to essentialist folklorization and dependence on state approval, Dillingham argues that in Oaxaca it was also a concession made to activist demands (176–177). As a number of Latin American states in recent decades enacted legal and constitutional reforms acknowledging their plurinational character, debate continues over whether state recognition enshrines what Aníbal Quijano famously called the "coloniality of power," or whether it can reflect mobilization from below to assert political and economic power and self-determination.¹¹

The last three books reviewed here are compilations published in Latin America (all available online), combining theory and case studies, focusing on a diverse range of autonomy movements across the region resisting the oppressive structures of colonialism and capitalism up through the contemporary era. *Autonomías y autogobierno en la América diversa*, edited by Miguel González, Araceli Burguete Cal y Mayor, José Marimán, Pablo Ortiz-T., and Ritsuko Funaki, is a hefty tome examining a wide range of cases of Indigenous autonomy across Latin America.¹² This volume is divided into three sections: The first part highlights the post-multicultural constriction of rights, analogous to what Hooker and colleagues refer to as a hemispheric "racial retrenchment," in which neoliberal dispossession is overlaid with policies of limited recognition by states. The second part examines the mixture of opportunities and limitations of pursuing rights in national and international juridical frameworks, a strategy that is not mutually exclusive of mobilization and direct action. The third part goes beyond the politics of recognition, focusing on struggles based on autonomy as an emancipatory and transformative process.

In the first part of *Autonomías y autogobierno en la América diversa*, several chapters on Bolivia (by María Fernanda Herrera Acuña and by John Cameron and Wilfredo Plata) show how the ability of Indigenous peoples and organizations to exercise their theoretical rights

⁹ See Adela Cedillo and Fernando Calderón, eds., *Challenging Authoritarianism in Mexico: Revolutionary Struggles and the Dirty War, 1964–1982* (New York: Routledge, 2012); Tanalís Padilla, *Unintended Lessons of Revolution: Student Teachers and Political Radicalism in Twentieth-Century Mexico* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2021).

¹⁰ On the politics of recognition and multiculturalism, see Glen Sean Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014); Charles R. Hale, "Neoliberal Multiculturalism: The Remaking of Cultural Rights and Racial Dominance in Central America," *Political and Legal Anthropology Review* 28, no. 1 (2005): 10–28.

¹¹ See Aníbal Quijano, "Colonialidad del poder, eurocentrismo, y América Latina," in *La colonialidad del saber: Eurocentrismo y ciencias sociales. Perspectivas latinoamericanas*, ed. Edgardo Lander (Buenos Aires: CLACSO, 2000), 201–246; Roger Merino, *Socio-Legal Struggles for Indigenous Self-Determination in Latin America: Reimagining the Nation, Reinventing the State* (New York: Routledge, 2021).

¹² This book builds on a previous, similarly wide-ranging compilation, *La autonomía a debate: Autogobierno indígena y Estado plurinacional en América Latina*, ed. Miguel González, Araceli Burguete Cal y Mayor, and Pablo Ortiz-T. (Quito: FLACSO, GTZ, IWGIA, CIESAS, UNICH, 2010).

under the plurinational state was constrained by the bureaucratic labyrinth of state control, and by the MAS government's pursuit of neoextractivism and the electoral logic of consolidating its rural political base. Miguel González's chapter on Nicaragua, reinforcing themes found in Baracco's edited work discussed above, points to the regression of the 1987 negotiated regional autonomy into violent dispossession and Indigenous-territorial disempowerment (163), prompting defensive strategies to fend off the authoritarian and extractivist inclinations of the second Ortega administration. Two chapters consider Mapuche struggles. In Argentina (Verónica Azpiroz Cleñan), autonomy is hampered by territorial dispersion and the model of nonethnic federalism of the colonial state along with the state bureaucracy's paternalistic attitudes toward the Indigenous. José A. Marimán's chapter on Chile shows how the colonial mentality of elites has denied any constitutional reform of the state that would allow for ethnonational pluralism resulting in Indigenous self-government.

Part 2 of *Autonomías y autogobierno en la América diversa* balances the previous section's pessimism about state recognition of plurinationalism with a more mixed assessment of the strategic use of discourses of group rights within the counterhegemonic fissures of national, inter-American, and international legal frameworks. These chapters consider the opportunities presented by juridical pluralism, as well as the pitfalls that can accompany the "judicialization of politics."¹³ Chapters on Mexico (by Araceli Burguete Cal y Mayor and by Consuelo Sánchez) and Panama (Bernal D. Castillo) point to new spaces in the courts resulting from the opening to Indigenous customary law, but also to the tendency to relegate the rights of autonomy to a secondary plane. Many of the contributions in this part highlight how the internal process of deciding how to engage with state institutions is a crucial factor shaping prospects for autonomy. Burguete Cal y Mayor's chapter on the municipality of Oxchuc in Chiapas, Mexico, shows the weight of the local clientelistic political culture affecting the outcome of the community decision on whether to be governed by traditional *usos y costumbres* or by the party-electoral system. A chapter on a Mexican Indigenous women's organization (Dolores Figueroa Romero and Laura Hernández Pérez) examines the organized process of gendering autonomy demands, through "political intersectionality" (355) that transformed generations of Indigenous leadership. A chapter on Bolivia (Magali Viena Copa-Pabón, Amy M. Kennemore, and Elizabeth López-Canelas) focuses on the microprocesses of autonomy, showing how new forms of social-political organization emerged to reappropriate the official construct of plurinationality.

Part 3 of the volume looks even more explicitly inward at autonomy movements, beyond state recognition and legal reforms, to focus on the development of new collective political subjectivities. A case study of an Aymara municipality in Bolivia (Ana Cecilia Arteaga Böhr) highlights Indigenous women's antipatriarchal struggles at the normative and institutional levels, in parallel with processes of reconstitution and ethnogenesis of the traditional Indigenous communal structure of the *ayllu*. Mariana Mora examines how Indigenous responses to extreme violence in Mexico have necessitated a shift from propositive to defensive autonomy, to confront state policies of securitization and extractivism. Examining an ejido land dispute in Chiapas, Mora shows how an Indigenous community resisted dispossession and repression and reasserted collective rights by wresting control of the judicial process from state-recognized anthropologists and human

¹³ See Rachel Sieder, "The Juridification of Politics," in *The Oxford Handbook of Law and Anthropology*, ed. Marie-Claire Foblets, Mark Goodale, Maria Sapignoli, and Olaf Zenker (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 701–715. Some critics suggest that "juridical pluralism," based on the dual recognition of Western liberal and Indigenous normative systems, in practice reproduces colonial patterns by relegating the latter to subordinate status: Antonio Carlos Wolkmer, "Rethinking Practices of Legal Pluralism in Latin America," *Revista Crítica de Ciências Sociais*, no. 132 (2023): 27–48.

rights nongovernmental organizations, expanding the boundaries of self-determination.¹⁴ Chapters on the Wampís Nation in Peru (Shapiom Noningo and Frederica Barclay), Guaraní struggles in the Bolivian lowlands (Pere Morell i Torra), and emerging solidarity and self-defense among Black and Indigenous communities in Colombia (Viviane Weitzner) point to subjective definitions of autonomy as political and cultural emancipation and collective survival. Orlando Aragón Andrade's chapter on the Purépecha municipality of Cherán in Michoacán, Mexico, shows a defensive uprising in 2011 against the state and drug cartels. This autonomy project simultaneously implemented de facto autonomy through a process of reinventing ethnic identity while seizing an opening for de jure autonomous self-government under customary law that gave Indigenous authorities control over the municipality's share of the federal budget. In all these cases, we see the emergence of self-defined collective subjects who are not waiting for external concessions of rights.

Reclaiming the commons

Another compilation, *Pensar las autonomías: Experiencias de autogestión, poder popular y autonomía*, edited by Alicia Hopkins and César Enrique Pineda, adopts the "autonomy as emancipation" approach suggested in the chapters in part 3 of the compilation by González and coauthors. The subject is popular mobilization broadly conceived, including not only Indigenous movements but also factory and land recoveries, neighborhood and other communal organizing, as well as the bottom-up reconfiguration of a variety of social and cultural spaces. Authors here focus less on the political-institutional mechanisms of self-government and more on the process of empowerment within movements through a new praxis based on horizontalism, mutual aid, and sharing of the commons.¹⁵ An introductory chapter by Pineda refers to a previous compilation including some of the same authors, who trace the genealogy of these processes to traditions of anarchism, historical Indigenous resistance, and autonomist (libertarian) Marxism.¹⁶

A first part of *Pensar las autonomías*, unlike most of the other works reviewed here, covers urban popular movements, including chapters on post-1968 Mexico, 2008 Athens, and Brazil's Movimento dos Trabalhadores Sem-Teto (MTST) of unhoused urban workers that developed as an offshoot of the more familiar rural MST. The MTST story (Débora Goulart) reveals internal tensions, as "pragmatic" compromises by the Workers' Party government and unions led to increasing institutionalization and deradicalization of the movement. Dario Azzellini's chapter on Venezuela's communal councils in this section emphasizes the empowering experience of participatory decision-making, yet acknowledges tensions with

¹⁴ A similar case of Indigenous people taking charge of their own process of "community juridification" is discussed in Salvador Aquino-Centeno, "Experticias y juridificación comunitaria: Defensa del subsuelo y tierras comunales en Oaxaca, México," *ÍCONOS Revista de Ciencias Sociales* 26, no. 72 (2022): 13–32.

¹⁵ The concept of autonomy as a process of building the commons is developed in Raquel Gutiérrez Aguilar, *Horizontes comunitario-populares: Producción de lo común más allá de las políticas estado-céntricas* (Madrid: Traficantes de Sueños, 2017). Many Indigenous people in Oaxaca use the term *comunalidad* to express a shared valorization of communal practices, relations with nature and territory, and values of reciprocity and solidarity. See Jaime Martínez Luna, "Conocimiento y comunalidad," *Bajo el Volcán* 15, no. 23 (2015): 99–112, <https://www.redalyc.org/pdf/286/28643473006.pdf>.

¹⁶ Ezequiel Adamovsky et al., *Pensar las autonomías: Alternativas de emancipación al capital y el Estado* (Mexico City: Bajo Tierra Ediciones, 2011). The growing number of movements occupying and reconfiguring a variety of spaces in society are discussed in Raúl Zibechi, *Territories in Resistance: A Cartography of Latin American Social Movements*, trans. Ramon Ryan (Oakland, CA: AK Press, 2012), and John Holloway, *Crack Capitalism* (London: Pluto Press, 2010). For a critical perspective on whether such movements can scale up, see Kevin Young and Michael Schwartz, "Can Prefigurative Politics Prevail? The Implications for Movement Strategy in John Holloway's *Crack Capitalism*," *Journal of Classical Sociology* 12, no. 2 (2012): 220–239.

the centralizing tendencies of the state. These cases illustrate the dilemmas of negotiating autonomy with parties and states.

A second part examines social and ideological spaces in the realms of education, self-defense, communication, and production. Three chapters on popular education examine experiences of the MST (César E. Ortega Elorza), Zapatistas (Bruno Baronnet), and Argentina's "people's high schools" (*bachilleratos populares*). These alternative political-pedagogical projects have transformative potential for students, teachers, and community by carving out what one author refers to as a "habitus of rebellion" (207), autonomous spaces for resisting neoliberal hegemony. The collective authors of the study on the *bachilleratos populares* note that public and state are not the same thing, suggesting the public sphere can be generated autonomously from state control.¹⁷ Several contributors in this second section examine Indigenous experiences of self-government, focusing on the subjective processes of building community, solidarity, and militant commitment to the collective. Giovanna Gasparello's excellent chapter on campesino and Indigenous resistance to megaprojects focuses on the conjunction between land as a material resource and territory as a sociocultural construct. Another interesting chapter on Peru's self-defense *rondas campesinas* (Leif Korsbaek and Marcela Barrios Luna) raises the question of the obligations of states to provide citizens with security and human rights, versus the rights of communities to define and implement those things for themselves, withholding legitimation from state institutions. In rejecting the Western, state-centric juridical framework in favor of Indigenous and campesino community traditions, the *rondas* cite the 1989 Convention 169 of the International Labor Organization on rights of Indigenous and tribal peoples, a legal authority that ironically rests on the agreement of states. The convention also requires states party to obtain the "free, prior, and informed consent" (FPIC) of Indigenous communities before allowing development projects in their territories. Yet internal divisions as well as external co-optation have plagued community self-defense groups and FPIC consultations. Other chapters discuss the challenges faced by community radio stations in Oaxaca (Jaime Martínez Luna) and documentary filmmakers (Ana Lúcia Nunes) in countering hegemonic narratives. All these problems suggest the daunting challenges for what Pineda calls the "radical expression of autonomy confronting state, market, criminal, and *cacique* [boss politics] powers" (9), a context sometimes lost in the microfocus of this book.

The third part of *Pensar las autonomías* looks at the process of community building for resistance within the Zapatista and Cherán autonomy projects. In both scenarios, a powerful resource for autonomy and resistance is developed in the interstices of everyday practices, reimagining traditional communal life. In Cherán, this includes what Edgars Martínez Navarrete calls "productive identity forms" (419) such as community forest guards and reforestation, along with reconfigured spaces such as community assemblies, bonfires, and Purépecha cultural revival. Odín Ávila Rojas's chapter shows how the Zapatistas also fostered communal dynamics in collective production on recovered lands, new structures of rotating and participatory self-governance, and the production of knowledge and historical memory through community-led education. While the Zapatista political identity calls for "resistance," defined as refusal to accept government aid or programs, autonomy in Cherán is a hybrid of *de jure* and *de facto* strategies, attempting to reappropriate state resources within a framework of juridical pluralism and state recognition of Indigenous rights to self-governance. Yet they share an understanding of autonomy as emancipatory everyday practices and communal social relations.

The final work considered here is the volume edited by Santiago Bastos Amigo and Edgars Martínez Navarrete, *Colonialismo, comunidad, y capital: Pensar el despojo, pensar*

¹⁷ This argument is reminiscent of the concept of "subaltern counterpublics" in Nancy Fraser, "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy," *Social Text*, no. 25/26 (1990): 56–80.

América Latina. The authors analyze the dual dynamics of dispossession and resistance, focusing on the intersections of colonialism, community, and capital. Drawing explicitly on David Harvey's concept of "accumulation by dispossession" in the era of neoliberal capitalism, contributors examine both the material bases and the subjective elements of organizing resistance to the depredations of states and capital.¹⁸

An introductory chapter by César Enrique Pineda outlines five broad transversal themes of the book. One is that the current phase of neoliberal globalization has a totalizing impact, spanning the conflict between capital and nature (environmental collapse) and the historical hierarchies of colonialism and patriarchy (confronted by rising women's movements and Indigenous-campesino struggles). A second theme is that colonialism continues to shape new modalities of racialized and gendered oppression. A third is that the current surge of extractivism and organized resistance marks an intensification of asymmetries and contradictions in the global model of appropriation of the biosphere. A fourth, drawing on Marxist and feminist theory, is that a new logic of reproduction of life revolves around the communitarian production of the commons through cooperative sociopolitical praxis. A fifth theme is the organizational process of autonomous community building, with all its tensions, as a form of resistance to domination.

A second chapter by Héctor Nahuelpán Moreno applies these highly abstract themes to Mapuche struggles in Ngulumapu (Chile), arguing that the "postcolonial" state has continuously practiced colonial violence and plunder since the nineteenth century.¹⁹ Chapter 3 (Edgars Martínez Navarrete) situates the autonomy struggle in Cherán in the historical context of capitalist appropriation and plunder, tracing the emergence of new identities of resistance "rooted in distinct productive, political, and ethnic experiences of 'communalism' present in the history of Cherán" (138). In chapter 4, Santiago Bastos Amigo analyzes the mobilization of Indigenous communities in Guatemala against neoliberal extractivism, highlighting processes of "ethnic re-creation" in which the communities transform themselves into "rights-bearing collective historical subjects" (170) in the course of anticolonial and anticolonial struggles.²⁰ Chapter 5 (Mina Lorena Navarro Trujillo) examines how community resistance against extractivist offensives by the state and capital in Mexico has forged connections between campesino and Indigenous communities in defense of life and the commons. A final chapter by Cristina Cielo and Elizabeth López Canelas on antiextractivist mobilization in Ecuador and Bolivia explores the gendered and racialized hierarchies central to the plunder of the commons through direct expropriation of land, as well as violent displacement and precarization that facilitates appropriation of the "territorialized commons," represented by the unremunerated social reproduction labor of Black and Indigenous women.

Colonialismo, comunidad, y capital is notable for its ambitious theoretical scope and for its historical perspective that views colonialism as an ongoing process rather than a legacy of the past. It also creatively combines a materialist focus on relations of production in the neoliberal era, marked by intensified extractivism and violent dispossession, with analysis of the processes shaping collective subjectivities of resistance.

¹⁸ David Harvey, *The New Imperialism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

¹⁹ This argument about internal colonialism is developed by Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui, *Violencias (re)encubiertas en Bolivia* (La Paz: Piedra Rota, 2010). In her view, "the decolonial is a fashion, the postcolonial a desire, and the anti-colonial a permanent and daily struggle." See Sergio Calderón Harker, "Decolonial: Abya Yala's Insurgent Epistemologies," *The Funambulist*, no. 50 (October 2023): 45, <https://thefunambulist.net/magazine/redefining-our-terms/decolonial-abya-yalas-insurgent-epistemologies>.

²⁰ Elsewhere, the author has referred to this process as "ethnic rearticulation": Santiago Bastos, "Community, Dispossession, and Ethnic Rearticulation in Mexico and Guatemala," *Latin American and Caribbean Ethnic Studies* 16, no. 2 (2021): 109–129.

Commonalities and divergences

Taken together, these works show the rich discussion and debate inspired by subaltern struggles in the Americas in recent decades. A common thread is grassroots opposition to hegemonic projects of states and global capital, but the focus on the collective subject of struggle varies, alternatively foregrounding convergences of Indigenous and Afro-descendant movements and the racial dimension of anticolonialism, ethnic and class convergences of Indigenous-campesino movements, broader popular sector alliances, or the intersectional dimension of gender. The cases included in these books reflect the wide variety of underlying philosophies and strategies of the region's autonomy movements, including the more state-directed model in Bolivia, the negotiated regional political-administrative devolution in Nicaragua, and the radical versions represented by Zapatista de facto community-based autonomy and by the Mapuche *rupturista* demand for territorial control. Each of these strategies has its strengths and vulnerabilities within specific national-historical contexts.

A key ongoing debate revolves around whether de jure autonomy negotiated with states—for example, in the spaces opened by Mexico's historical *indigenista* policies, or in the judicial platforms afforded by state legal-constitutional concessions to juridical pluralism and the international legal framework of free, prior, and informed consent for development schemes in Indigenous ancestral lands—can offer opportunities for a reappropriation of power or represents more of a trap leading to demobilization and cooptation. Alongside these questions of strategy is the theoretical debate over the politics of recognition and whether an anticolonial agenda can be advanced while the state retains the prerogative of deciding which peoples and rights are to be recognized. Many of the authors reviewed here question whether the “multicultural turn” since the 1990s has run its course, and even contributed to a racist backlash against Black and Indigenous peoples. The September 2022 referendum in Chile, in which voters overwhelmingly rejected a new constitution that would have recognized an Indigenous justice system and defined the country as a “Plurinational and Intercultural State,” seems to be a case in point.

Underlying these debates is the structural context of neoliberal capitalism, repackaged to include discourses of top-down recognition of diverse cultural identities and state-orchestrated “consultations” over megaprojects, framed in the language of individual freedom rather than communal self-determination. The extractivist boom in global capitalism since the late twentieth century, including the variant of neo-extractivism promoted by states with self-proclaimed progressive governments, has intensified conflict over land and territory, sharpening the focus on autonomy movements as resistance to the collusion of states and capital in the global project of “accumulation by dispossession.” The deepening climate crisis, and “green extractivism” driven by the scramble for lithium and other non-fossil sources of energy, suggest that autonomy movements will continue to be a key node of contention. At the same time, widespread dissatisfaction with the failings of liberal-representative democracy and neoliberal capitalism have fostered racist and exclusionary populist discourses, reinforcing the imperative for radical rethinking of more sustainable social and political models for sharing the commons.

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