

Making Your Own Media: The Oaxacan Feminist Subaltern Counterpublic Sphere

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Feminist movements are defining paradigms of vital public spheres, yet the theoretical fiction persists that these political arenas, especially subaltern counterpublic spheres, are parasitic on the bourgeois public sphere (Fraser, 1990).¹ One feminist subaltern counterpublic sphere is in southern India, where dalit women in the 75 *sanghams* under the Deccan Development Society have been producing for the last three decades sustainable agricultural produce, successfully negotiating deals with the landlords (including in the case of one *sangham*, sharecropping, and splitting the produce on the land 50:50 with the landlord), as well as making their own media. These women are producing culture and knowledge other than agriculture by producing videos that are literate and sophisticated, with a preference for camera angles that are low, looking up at their work, with other views of the landlords looking down on them (Patel, 2010).

In another part of the world, in Oaxaca, Mexico, there is speculation on the origins of the APPO, *Asamblea Popular de los Pueblos de Oaxaca*, considered by many as a model for a global justice movement from below. Even so, some people wonder “who is behind all this?” But most people believe the words of the movement, “There are no leaders . . . we the people.” The Oaxacan priest Carlos Franco advised the APPO that it must define its own identity, “know who it is and why it is,” and address up front “delicate” issues such as the role of indigenous women who have historically been second-class players, even though they took over the television station Channel 9 and are now risking arrest and reprisals; “So it’s not only a question of wearing the pants, but also of wearing the panties” as one commentator puts it (Davies, [2007] p.91).

In this essay, I advance an analysis that reverses the hierarchy of bourgeois public sphere and subaltern counterpublics in order to argue that it is in the making and functioning of the subaltern feminist counterpublics that the global social justice movement gains critical mass. This moves us past binaries like the city and the countryside, the center and the periphery, low/popular and high/elite culture, the post-industrial information societies and developing societies, to the new structuring binary, that of neoliberal corporati-

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zation and alternative paradigms of resistance. The reversal also puts the mediation of the subaltern counterpublics or multitudes (as Antonio Negri and Martin Barbero put it) in the forefront of the agenda for globalization studies, in general, and in media studies, in particular.² In the active reception of, engagement with, and resistance to neocolonial neoliberal corporate globalization, the masses re-produce and re-make the media; therefore, subaltern counterpublics are not only consuming and distributing publics, they are producing publics in late capitalism.

In the first part of the essay, I make this argument primarily through addressing a particular theoretical oversight in public sphere theorizing the role of postcolonial theory in outlining the role of imperialism and colonialism in the formation of the European bourgeois public sphere. I suggest that it is only when we take account of the history of colonialism and imperialism in the evolution of the European bourgeois public sphere that we can accurately understand and appreciate the enormous vitality and creativity of the subaltern public sphere in social justice movements in the neocolonial era of globalism. In the second section of the essay, I take forward my argument for a serious engagement by public sphere studies with postcolonial theory by suggesting a postcolonial reworking of the persistent issue of identity in subaltern social justice movements. Finally, in the last section of the essay, I briefly review one such recent alternative organization of the feminist subaltern counterpublic sphere in the non-hierarchical, horizontal, non-party oriented political nature of the indigenous resistance to corporate globalization as it is articulated in Oaxaca uprising of 2006 in Mexico.

The Colonial Moment in Bourgeois Public Sphere Theorizing: The Return of the Repressed

Very soon after the English translation and publication of Jürgen Habermas's *Structural Transformation* in 1989, the notion of the overarching, singular bourgeois public sphere was challenged by the interdisciplinary theorizing about the counterpublic sphere. The challenge was mounted principally on the basis of gender (Felski; Fraser; Benhabib), queer sexuality (Warner), ethnicity, race or nationality (Calhoun, "Introduction"; Robbins; Black Public Sphere Collective). These scholars contested the inclusiveness of the bourgeois public sphere dominated by the straight white male of property and proposed that women, queers, people of color, immigrants and other minor publics create rival publics as well as rival modes of publicness.

What has been sorely missing from the discussion about counterpublics is the voice and perspective of postcolonial studies. The only time Habermas uses the term "colonization" is when he seeks to describe modern society as distinguished between life-world and social systems, and he uses the term "colonized" to describe the antagonistic relation between life-world and social system such that the former is encroached by the instrumental rationality of the latter (1987, p.293, 522). But Habermas's use of the term is ahistorical and uninformed by postcolonial theory and therefore does not address the

theoretical omission. The question then is, Does the exclusion constitute the rejection of just another minor public? Or, does the exclusion of the postcolonial signify something more? I suggest that the omission is a serious one, the effects of which can be encapsulated in the phrase, "the return of the repressed." To begin with, the evacuation of the postcolonial perspective from the historical birth of the bourgeois public sphere renders the his-story of the narrative of the liberal bourgeois public sphere in very Christian terms: of Edenic utopia and then the fall. The upshot of the Christianized version of this history is that it makes public sphere theorizing vulnerable both to the charge of ethnocentrism and also of a certain kind of golden ageism. Moreover, this version of history obscures the quality of political changes taking place in the global era, making us fearful and intolerant of the changes brought about in the public sphere through social justice movements, characterizing them all as degenerative transformations—or, in the post-9/11 political vocabulary of the world, as "terrorism."

The lack of acknowledgement of the role of colonialism in the economic prosperity and autonomy of the eighteenth century British middle class which allowed a bourgeois public sphere to come into being becomes a specter that haunts the future of public sphere theorizing because it vitiates the promise on which a positive relationship with our present depends. At the same time, it is important to note that for Habermas the demand for improvement of the present human situation is "the unfinished project of modernity," a project whose attainment requires problematic belief in political principles of bourgeois democracy, the validity of which is supposedly universal because they hold across historical and cultural specificities. However, it is difficult to expect principles that stem from these very vitiated circumstances to offer remediation unless we first acknowledge and recognize the omission that structures the very birth of these principles.

At the second level of effects, leaving the legacy of colonialism and imperialism out of the frame of the debate concerning counterpublics leaves us in the theoretically suspect position of expecting only counterpublics, not the dominant public, to justify their claim to the prefix of "counter" in order to be recognized as legitimate counterpublics. Additionally it divides up the world into the West and the rest, leading to the ironic situation where we are caught by surprise at how the processes of globalization and transnationalization are rendering obsolete and inadequate some of the cherished ideas of the liberal bourgeois public sphere.³

I suggest that the inclusion of the postcolonial perspective into bourgeois public sphere theorizing introduces a necessary dystopian moment from the very inception in the relationship between the liberal bourgeois public sphere and the nation-state that has a number of significant interrelated theoretical consequences. Here, in a preliminary way, I suggest three specific but influential consequences of the inclusion: the first is that the introduction of the dystopian moment explains in part why the subsequent history of the normative ideal has been unattainable and in fact always appears as degraded. Second, at the meta-political level of analysis, the inclusion of the

postcolonial perspective has significant implications for how we recognize and theorize redistributive justice resistance movements as counterpublics. In particular, the inclusion of the postcolonial moment allows us the possibility of subverting the bourgeois public sphere, estranging its normativity, examining it as a particular variant—a Western European variant—rather than the model of public sphere theorizing. Further, the inclusion of the dystopian postcolonial moment normalizes the antagonistic relationship of the state and civil society so that we may see why and how from the very beginning the counterpublic sphere and the nation-state must indeed be engaged in an antagonistic relationship. It is a conflictual relationship, moreover, which increasingly in the era of globalization and transnationality, makes the nation-state inadequate as the proper frame and site for counterpublic movements. Third and final, the inclusion of postcolonial counterpublics makes a strong and persuasive case for the serious and enduring engagement with the issues of collective identity formation and performance of identity in counterpublic sphere theory especially when it comes to mobilizing and sustaining subaltern feminist resistance movements.

The Western European Variant of the Bourgeois Public Sphere: Transformative Contradictions

Jurgen Habermas's *Structural Transformation* develops a historically specific understanding of the modern category of publicness. This historically specific understanding of publicness means that we should be very careful not to expect or apply the Western notion of the bourgeois public sphere to other historical situations and societies. The bourgeois public sphere, Craig Calhoun explains in his excellent introduction to the book *Structural Transformation*, is "a category that is typical of an epoch" which cannot be separated from "the unique developmental history of that 'civil society' (*bürgerliche Gesellschaft*) originating in the European High Middle Ages." This means that it cannot "be transferred, an ideal typically generalized, to any number of historical situations that represent formally similar constellations" (*Structural*, p. xvii). Habermas has a particular nation in mind as a model case of the development of the bourgeois public sphere: Great Britain. According to Habermas, Great Britain as "the model case" of the development of the public sphere has three features: first, an attendant political press; and second, along with a political press, a representative British Parliament not amenable to any notion of a "loyal opposition" (*Structural*, p.14).

The third, and for the purposes of my argument, most significant feature in the evolution of the European notion of the bourgeois public sphere is one that Habermas takes note of in his encyclopedia article about the public sphere. Along with the evolution of the bourgeois public sphere, Habermas observes the simultaneous emergence of another important political entity, *viz.* the nation-state: "The representative public sphere yielded to that new sphere of 'public authority' which came into being with national and territorial states" ("Public Sphere," p.51). Calhoun remarks, "The seventeenth- and eighteenth-century notion [of the public sphere] developed along-

side the rise and transformation of the modern state, as well as on the basis of capitalist economic activity" (p.7). The reference to "national and territorial states" made by Habermas and picked up on by Calhoun is significant for the discursive interface between the nation-state and the public sphere at two levels: first, because it suggests that what made the public sphere bourgeois was not simply the class composition of its members, or the fact that its rational-critical discourse was created by the "new sociability" of modernity that took place in salons and coffee houses. Rather, the reference to the emergence of the nation-state foregrounds the fact that the bourgeois public sphere is as much a function of the emergence of the liberal ideology of the nation-state as it is a function of the capitalist economy, on which the idea of the liberal nation-state is premised.

At a second but no less significant level, the recognition of the simultaneous evolution of the modern European bourgeois public sphere within the modern liberal nation-state as described in the "model case" of Great Britain renders visible the unacknowledged ghost of colonialism, which haunts and undermines the achievements of the European bourgeois public sphere. Indeed, the phantom of colonialism generates divisions at yet another level of the already split functioning of the bourgeois public sphere. Habermas explains the transformation and disjunction in this way: on the basis of an effective public sphere, the constitutional state predicated on civil rights "pretended" to be an organization of public power ensuring the public sphere's subordination to the needs of a private sphere (which was itself taken to be neutral with regards to power and domination). "Thus," according to Habermas, already from its inception, "the constitutional norms implied a model of civil society . . . [that] by no means corresponded to its reality" (p.84). At the same time, also in reference to the split function of the bourgeois public sphere, Habermas points out that ideology as an idealized aspect of truth dates from the inception of the bourgeois constitutional state:

If ideologies are not only manifestations of the socially necessary consciousness in its essential falsity, if there is an aspect to them that can lay claim to truth inasmuch as it transcends the status quo in utopian fashion, if only for purposes of justification, then ideology exists at all only from this period on. Its origin would be the identification of "property owner" with "human being as such" in the role accruing to private people as members of the public in the political public sphere of the bourgeois constitutional state. (*Structural*, p.88)

This benign contradiction between ideology and the prevailing social conditions would in time become fundamentally transformed as a pretension to power on the part of the constitutional state premised on the subordination of the public sphere to the private sphere.

Postcolonial theory points to yet another transformative contradiction, one which attests less to the "falsity" of ideology and more to the double-speak encoded in the ideology of the Western Euro-

pean bourgeois public sphere. As Homi Bhabha puts it, “The discourse of post-Enlightenment English colonialism often speaks in a tongue that is forked, not false” (p.85). The double-speak in ideology is a function of the fact that the national borders of an imperial power like Great Britain did not coincide with its natural borders but extended beyond its shores to other continents and other peoples. Therefore, the pretension that Great Britain is a constitutional state based on civil rights has a double address so that it is not a posturing that has local and national political significance only; colonialism makes sure that its ripple effects are felt all the way to the British colonies of Asia and Africa.

In the case of post-Enlightenment Great Britain, the dominant ideology of the constitutional state and national identity is belied by its diachronic imperial presence and colonial relations with other peoples in other spaces. Bhabha makes the connection very explicit. He writes:

For at the same time as the question of cultural difference emerged in the colonial text, discourses of civility were defining the doubling moment of the emergence of Western modernity. Thus the political and theoretical genealogy of modernity lies not only in the origins of the idea of civility but in this history of the colonial moment. (p.32)

Bhabha rightly cites the colonial moment that—like the figure of the woman in the patriarchal history of the world—provides a non-continuous problematic that, first, foregrounds the ambivalent structure of the idea of civility as it draws a conflictual boundary between the private and the public sphere. Moreover, for Bhabha an agonistic uncertainty is contained in the incompatibility of the identity of the empire with the nation. It puts on trial the very discourse of civility by which representative government claims its liberty and empire its ethics. Therefore, Bhabha concludes, “Colonialist governmentality cannot maintain its civil authority once the colonial supplementarity or excess of their address is revealed” (96).

Without acknowledging the repercussions of what Bhabha refers to as the “supplementarity” of address of the colonial moment at the very inception of the European bourgeois public sphere, many theorists of the counterpublic sphere acknowledge the lack of isomorphism between the borders of the state and the imaginary of the nation, and they regard this identification of the state with the national imaginary as an “accident of inclusion [which] became a reality of moral entitlement that has bedeviled us ever since” (Calhoun, *Social*, p.3). Similarly, it is worth noting that Habermas did insist in his original theory that the bourgeois public sphere must be kept conceptually distinct from the legislative sphere and the official economy. This distinction, he indicates, constitutes the distinction between the context of justification and the context of discovery (*Between*, p.307). In other words, Habermas suggests that the unregulated public sphere is the context of discovery and engenders rational-critical discourse, while the state or parliamentary body such as the legislature, on the other hand, is the only agency allowed to

act and therefore function as the context of justification.

However, neither the recognition that the nation and state are not isomorphic nor the drawing of the distinction between the unregulated context of discovery and the official context of justification compensates for the theoretical oversight that neglects postcolonial theory. In fact, this oversight forces us to consider the implications for rethinking Habermas's concept of immanent critique. That is, the introduction of the dystopian moment of colonialism right from the moment of the inception of the public sphere forces us to re-examine and re-evaluate Habermas's deliberate overlooking of the specific historical conditions of the bourgeois public sphere as the context of the concept of immanent critique. The former is undesirably linked to the totalizing Marxist tradition of ideology critique.⁴ Instead, by taking account of the legacy of colonialism, we will be able to restore the context of specific historical conditions as the proper grounding for Habermas's concept of immanent critique. At the same time, following Habermas, a recuperation of the concept of immanent critique in the era of globalism can be taken account of by shifting the grounds of the concept of immanent critique to universal characteristics of human communication. One implication of this theoretical advance is that the double address of the European bourgeois public sphere brings into being counterpublics within its own borders as well as the colonies beyond those borders. As I will explain in the next section, one of the most vexed issues that plagues these counterpublics is the issue of identity. Through a post-colonial examination of the question of identity in counterpublic sphere theorizing, I offer one alternative perspective on Habermas's normative theory of communicative action.

Counterpublic Spheres and Identity

The inclusion of the colonial moment introduces the struggle of identity construction from the very inception of the idea of the bourgeois public sphere. The colonial process and imperialism, starting from the eighteenth century and certainly in the nineteenth century, with the pursuit of colonies outside the nation-state boundaries, opens the stage for political movements whose concern is the self-assertion of national, ethnic, or racial identity rather than the care of a stable and self-contained public world (Arendt, 1967).⁵ Therefore, one of the reasons that identity has become so significant to theorizing of social justice movements as counterpublic sphere theorizing is that both are constituted through a conflictual relationship with the dominant bourgeois public.

When Habermas discusses the notion of identity, he does so in the context of what has been called the "unmastered past" of German intellectual history, to describe German attempts to come to terms with the Nazi past. He writes that it is essential that German national identity be understood solely in terms of the loyalty of its nationals to the republican constitution, without recourse to what he calls "the pre-political crutches of nationality and community of fate" (*Yet Again*). Yet again, for Habermas, Kant is the point of departure for the bourgeois public sphere as the definitive institution of democ-

racy. Habermas admires Kant for taking up the academic exchange as his model, thereby conceptualizing the public sphere as constituted around rational argument rather than the identities of the arguers.

But since Kant, mass media and mass communication have epitomized the times, and Habermas has analyzed the reasons for the current inadequacy of the Kantian public sphere. Habermas locates the insufficiency of the Kantian public sphere, first, in the speed involved in informatization which pressurizes the thinking and judgment amongst the consumer-citizens of present-day public spheres, and speed also directs the experience of politics to focus on the persona of the actors rather than the ideas advocated by the actors. In addition, Habermas attributes the effect of what he calls the “monological” borders of contemporary public spheres to this inadequacy; that is, he argues that the participants in the public sphere share morals and views that are already formed elsewhere. What makes this kind of monologism particularly pernicious is, according to Habermas, the added emphasis on fixed subjectivity over intersubjectivity in the current public sphere, which is contrary to Habermas’s own belief. To critique this emphasis, Habermas contributes the concept of intersubjectivity, by which he means the subjectivity that is neither “ethnocentrically adopted or converted but, rather, intersubjectively shared.” That is, it is dialogically achieved through the rational exchange among citizens (“Fundamentalism,” 37). In the next section, we will see how the subaltern counterpublics of Oaxaca subvert these Habermasian calculations, affirming their indigenous cultural identity intersubjectively.

Contemporary theories of counterpublics, despite their usage of the term “subaltern” as a prefix for the term counterpublics, as in “subaltern counterpublics,” a coinage introduced by Fraser in her oft-quoted inaugural article citing the feminist movement as the exemplar of subaltern counterpublics (p.67), and citation of the term by other scholars (Squires, p.446), suffer from keeping the term “subaltern” underused and underanalyzed in counterpublic theorizing. For instance, when Fraser introduces the term in her essay, she correctly attributes it to revisionist historiography taking place in the academy. However, she then quickly transitions to a positivistic rather than critical description and definition of this record-keeping:

This history records that members of subordinated social groups –women, workers, peoples of colors, and gays and lesbians—have repeatedly found it advantageous to constitute alternative publics. I propose to call these subaltern counterpublics in order to signal that they are parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counterdiscourses, which in turn permit them to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs. (p.67)

As the extract above shows, the overall effect of Fraser’s description of why she wishes to affix the term subaltern to counterpublics is to suggest, through the use of the word “advantageous,” that both

the recovery of the history as well as the invention and circulation of oppositional discourses is an easy and conventional matter amongst subordinated social groups. The reality is quite the opposite unless we take account only of recent history—history after feminism. The history of a subordinate group is often a very fragile and fraught matter, requiring reading the text of the subaltern against the grain, in order to recover the oppositional agency buried in the dominant representation. This is borne out by Gramsci's definition of the concept of the subaltern, as not simply an oppressed group, but lacking autonomy, subjected to the influence or hegemony of another social group, not possessing one's own hegemonic position. Therefore, subaltern counterpublics are especially vulnerable to being unable to define their identities, interests, and needs outside the ruling hegemonic discourse.

What Fraser's example shows is a general tendency in counterpublic sphere theorists—even as they recognize that identity discourses seem in an important sense as intrinsic to and partially defining the post-Enlightenment modern era, and are equally cognizant of the constructedness of identity in socialization—to assume fixed identities so that an equivalence and maturity and strength of opinions can be assumed for the purposes of participation. At the same time, according to this theoretical tendency, the public sphere calls for the citizens to put aside their differences of class identity, ethnic identity and gender identity in order to speak as individuals. An argument by Asen and Brouwer is one such response that typifies this trend:

[Group identities] may reify into essential identities, mask important differences among individual group members. Moreover, inhabitants of marginal identities do not always oppose domination in their activities in wider publics; to insist that oppositionality inheres in marginal identities is to overlook these peoples' mundane or hegemonically complicit activities. Finally an exclusive focus on identity may displace political and economic stratification as informing counterdiscourse and require the conceptual countenance of less-than-emancipatory counterpublics, which may undermine the larger aims of counterpublic theory. (p.8-9)

The warning by Asen and Brouwer about the dangers inherent in an exclusive focus on identity—like essentialized identities, as well as the issues of complicity and distraction—is an acknowledgement, albeit in the negative vein, of the power of identity discourse for counterpublics. Elsewhere Asen has proposed the idea of “emergent collectives” to address the problem of identity politics. He writes, “Emergent collectives fit less comfortably in a conception based on essential group identity,” and “The concept of emergent collectives permits appreciation of affirmative and potentially emancipatory formations of identity that acknowledge the dilemmas of difference” (p.438-9).

The response of Asen and Brouwer is typical of the reaction of counterpublic sphere theorists to identity issues: it oscillates between

the notion that members' identities are formed elsewhere, and, therefore, they are an obstacle to be overcome in progressive politics as well as the opposing conception that member identities work as glue that brings people together in emancipatory ways. Therefore, the preoccupation of the bourgeois public sphere with identity is always in the sense that makes identity into a singular rather than a multiple phenomenon, within and across publics (Calhoun, *Social*, p.23). In this way, it makes identity issues into obstacles to be overcome rather than the very differences that should be thematized as object of politics and which can then become the basis of solidarity.

The problem stems from Habermas's separation of social systems from life-worlds. That is, Habermas's public sphere analytically takes apart systems and life-worlds in Great Britain in the late seventeenth and eighteenth century in order to put them together as a bourgeois revolution. This analytic framework separates social systems from life-worlds, positing the latter as the locus of quality human relationships and undistorted communicative action that is vulnerable to colonization. Fraser has incisively pointed out the flawed separation in the case of the feminist counterpublic sphere.

But what are the implications when the public sphere is a part of the life-worlds of a society? The bourgeois subjectivity/identity as privatized individual family which stemmed from the audience-oriented subjectivity of the conjugal family's intimate domain is far removed from the subaltern/indigenous way of the community as family. One of the differences is apparent in the way bourgeois subjectivity culture becomes commodity and autonomous, a ready topic of discussion for an audience-oriented subjectivity for how it communicates with itself. But the relationship of the subaltern indigenous counterpublic sphere to their identity and culture is inseparable from their sociality. For instance, from Hispanic and Latin-American experience, Martin Barbero draws up a genealogy of a popular culture where the question is no longer the media, but processes of reception, recognition, and appropriation where place, time, and cultural competence are all forms of mediation that are crucial. It is this change of focus from media to mediation that makes it possible for subaltern counterpublics to read meaning into current events within the mixed populations of Latin America countries as they are increasingly caught up in global movements.

Oaxaqueños Identity and the Subaltern Counterpublic Sphere

Despite recent premature pronouncements announcing the demise of postcolonial theory and some serious questioning of the relationship, if any, between postcolonial studies and globalization studies, I contend that the omission of colonization affects the idea of the bourgeois public sphere both at the level of its received history as well as at the level of theorizing its alternative, the subaltern counterpublic sphere.⁶ However, the Latin American conceptualization of the coloniality-modernity binary, while drawing on dependency theory, emphasizes the spatial-economistic articulation of power and from this perspective, modernity is a structural relationship, not a substantive content. But according to Mignolo, unlike the

modern world-system theory which brings colonialism into the picture “as a derivative rather than a constitutive component of modernity,” the Latin American critique makes coloniality constitutive of capitalist modernity. For this reason, it is instructive to explore the question of identity in the subaltern counterpublic sphere in the Oaxaca uprising, which began in May of 2006 and continued until April of 2007.

If the bourgeois public sphere is constructed, according to Habermas, as the normative ideal, then the models for counterpublic sphere have to be counter hegemonic so that theorization follows instances of democracy not in the conventional sense but as potentialities that open up from below. This means recognizing that the bottom-up model of democracy based on the popular forms of sociality are closely involved with the construction of identity as an expression of their sociality, especially since people want to identify themselves as much by their leisure activities as by their profession. This is true of indigenous counterpublics like the Oaxaca commune of 2006, where the mediation by the counterpublic sphere—instead of creating alienation, consumerism, or passivity—shows how a social movement translates, localizes, and indigenizes identity issues in corporate neoliberal globalism through the feminist re-clamation of media technologies of the past as well as the present, the community radio and the television. These efforts by the counterpublic assist in mounting and arming the resistance to counteract the deprivations of globalization amongst subaltern indigenous communities.

The purpose of the Oaxacan rebellion is to end the neoliberal incarnation of capitalism. The desire for and emphasis on indigenous cultural identity in this struggle to end neoliberal capitalism is an important feature of the globalization movement from below, in general, and the Oaxacan movement in particular. According to George Salzman, an American academic living in Oaxaca and collaborator with Nancy Davies on a book of daily journalistic reports on the 2006 movement, *The People Decide: Oaxaca's Popular Assembly* (2007), the 2006 uprising is “a model for the world” because it is an eruption from below that questions the legitimacy of the Mexican government from a state like Oaxaca that is—among many things—one of the most impoverished (second only to Chiapas), most populous, as well as the richest in natural resources, and also unique because it contains the largest absolute number of people with indigenous ancestry in Mexico (Davies, p.201-2). The Oaxaca movement is a model of a bottom-up democracy also because like the Zapatistas, the Oaxacan struggle led to the formation of an unusual assembly, the APPO, comprised of around 365 social, political, human rights, non-governmental, environmental, gender, student, union organizations, indigenous communities, and thousands of independent Oaxacans (Gonzalez & Baeza, p.30). The organization, horizontal in structure, “is a nonpolitical formation, truly a people's government” because it abjures all activities that are considered political in the conventional sense in representative democracies. For this reason it termed itself the Popular Assembly of the Peoples of Oaxaca (La Asamblea Popular de los Pueblos de Oaxaca, or APPO in its Spanish initials) (Davies, p.207). Commenting on APPO's role

in the Oaxacan insurgency, Deborah Poole notes that it was not restricted to the struggle for questions of identity in the conventional sense, but rather it articulated a “collective desire to find a new language of political engagement” through which people could claim the right to be heard, a right that as yet has never “and in fact probably cannot be” guaranteed by any constitution. “On one level,” she notes, “this is a democratization of the airwave,” and “On another,” she adds, “it is a democratization of the very principle of right” (2007, p.114-5). In this way the Oaxacan people’s movement compels us to take note of another distinguishing aspect of subaltern counterpublics: the process and form that produce substantive changes are as important as the substantive content of the political changes. In the long term, the functioning of subaltern counterpublics teaches us that the process and form have greater influence on the sustainability of the change and resistance.

In his work on the bourgeois public sphere, Habermas acknowledges that the democratic project feeds off the resistance of minorities, whose hostility to the will of the majority at the present moment may renew the majority’s own self-understanding in the future (2003, p. 41-2). According to Habermas, this happens through the constitution, which is the political incarnation of the ideal of the moral community, whose norms and practices are fully accepted by its members, and in a republican democratic state the constitution is the quintessential model of discursive validation. What illustrates this discursive element is that as long as commonly agreed upon procedures are in place, the possibility of rationally articulating conflicts is in place. So even being loyal to the constitution is subject to constant revision on the part of all involved agents. It is the constitutional procedures that allow the resistant minority to articulate their dissent, which also allows the majority to remain critically engaged with their own decisions and thereby benefit from the former.

One way subaltern counterpublics accomplish this prioritization of form over content was illustrated by the statewide assembly, APPO, which although instigated as a result of the teachers’ strike and state repression, outstripped the teachers’ original demands. The only absolute requirement was that Governor Ulises Ruiz Ortiz, the governor of the state, must go. At the same time, as the movement spread, the APPO leadership has been shifted from the teachers’ union to the general population. The APPO is envisioned as the permanent body governing to the benefit of the majority. It is referred to as a “different participative democracy,” not oppositional like traditional political parties, but united despite differences of ideas and ideologies. The APPO assembly is not dominated by intellectuals or political radical groups; rather, it is a social movement of the people, largely served by nongovernmental organizations, to establish a space to break both the political and legal stranglehold of the PRI, the ruling Institutional Revolutionary Party, the party of Ruiz (Davies, p.38). That is why the teachers, the Zapatistas, and the APPO may be considered comparable organizations. The issues of each group, not the organizing method, constitute their differences. However, they all are concerned with the poverty of the many and the wealth of the few, and the disregard for the indigenous population. The APPO is openly anti-neoliberal, as are the Zapatistas.

The Oaxacan movement started as a teachers' strike. Yet, as Raul Gatica, an indigenous activist and member of the APPO, explained in an interview, "it was connections to the process of community resistance that brought the teachers to resist, not their identity as teachers" (Martin, p.212). That the teachers serve as the organic intellectuals in Mexico is illustrated by the fact that eighty-three municipal presidents across the country happen to be teachers, and the number of teachers statewide is nearly 70,000, while the population of the entire state is between 3,500,000 and 4,000,000. While, in general, the illiteracy rate in the state of Oaxaca is around 25 percent (compared to about 8 percent nationally), most of the illiterate are indigenous women. Further, even though the teachers, as state employees, are economically better off than the majority of the Oaxaqueños, the important exception are the bilingual teachers in indigenous communities. Not only are they paid less on the grounds that their positions require less academic preparation, but they also have to pay for books and other supplies for students out of their own pockets because their classrooms are so poorly equipped. In addition, they may face higher transportation costs in commuting to and from distant communities. Therefore, despite the economic divide, the students and their families swarmed to support the teachers' strike because of the personal bonds between the teachers and their students, and because both were victims of institutional neglect: the educational funds in Oaxaca are not required to be accounted for by law. Thus, the demands of the union included not only increased pay for the teachers and better school facilities but also monetary support for the pupils.

The Oaxaca movement negotiated the pitfalls of a counterpublic sphere movement to become a model of a globalization movement from below in other ways. An instance of the innovative character of the Oaxacan globalization movement from below is illustrated by the way in which it negotiates with counterpublic sphere identity issues. For instance, one of the frequent charges made against counterpublic sphere politics is that while it is identity-based, "it is isolated from the everyday practices which are not included within the subaltern counterpublic. In addition, identity formation for the 'subaltern' is only in opposition to the dominant identity of the public sphere and is given no positivity" (Deem p.140-1). But the Oaxacan movement is wide, pluralistic, multi-dimensional, and democratic in its avowed purpose to fight neoliberalism and the ultraright. In the APPO, the radical organizations have come together with the New Left of Oaxaca and human rights organizations as well as with students, teachers, workers, and housewives who support it. This pluralism is reflected early in the Oaxaca movement, the period of the most intense activity, known as the "Oaxaca Commune" which lasted for five months in 2006, from June 14 to November 25 (like the fifty day Paris Commune of 1871, when the workers instituted their own government in the capital city) when other demands were added to the teachers' strike. For instance, the demonstration in the week of May 22, 2006 was a civic protest against the degradation of the environment by excessive traffic, noise and dirt; the May 25 march included issues of gendered violence, condemning the Atenco rapes and violence by police (Davies, p.1-2).

The APPO also achieves a positive oppositional identity that includes “peoples’ mundane or hegemonically complicit activities” (Asen & Brouwer, p.8-9) by embracing historical and traditional forms of popular cultural organization, which include bottom-up, dynamic structures of democracy. The *asamblea* (assembly), for example, is an institution in which people have the power and the “leaders” are administrators who carry out the decisions of the community; the *guelaguetza*, from a Zapotec word, means mutual aid and is the symbol of solidarity; and *tequio* is a tradition of unpaid community work. The *asamblea* began to identify itself through these ancestral practices of the indigenous population of Oaxaca, in which at least 418 municipalities of the state continue to govern by the system of *usos y costumbres*, “uses and customs.” One of the more important aspects of *usos y costumbres* has been written into APPO regulations: authorities who don’t follow the people’s will are put aside. The tradition of *usos y costumbres* is a face-to-face method of governing, which, until its reactivation by APPO, had been damaged by the power of money and migration of people to urban areas, and the system of political parties. The politicization by APPO broke important barriers that united the members of the community, such as by implementing unpaid community service (*tequio*). Even today, statewide, most public works in some four hundred small communities are still carried out by citizen *tequios* that accomplish a variety of tasks like building roads; repairing churches; bringing in the harvest; and sharing the expenses of weddings, baptisms, or deaths (Davies, p.46). Oaxaca has 570 municipalities, of which 360 are governed by tradition of *usos y costumbres*, using the nonpolitical general popular assembly; the rest of the 210 are governed by some political party.⁷ The fabric that holds together the movement is thus social, not political in the conventional sense, founded on a sense of justice and injustice and the need for dignity. This feature shows how a popular movement becomes a vehicle in the counterpublic sphere to express the everyday common concerns of the people.

A significant feature of the Oaxacan movement as globalization movement from below is the desire for and emphasis on cultural identity.⁸ That is why one of the gravest accusations made against Governor Ruiz in addition to theft, repressions, and assassination, was the “failure to consult the citizenry about the public works that are destroying Oaxaca’s cultural heritage” (Davies, p.17). An example of what it would mean to respect Oaxacan cultural heritage was illustrated by the taking over by the indigenous people of the commercialized *Guelaguetza* events in July, 2006. The word *guelaguetza* itself means mutual aid—like neighbors bringing food and drink as well as a gift for a couple celebrating their wedding with the understanding that in time the neighbors will reciprocate and the reciprocity will circulate forever. The Governor had informed his audience that he had requested the federal government’s intervention to recoup the economic damage caused to Oaxaca by postponing the biggest tourist draw of the Oaxacan calendar. The event was not postponed; however, it was just celebrated as a free event and in different venues and on different days. Similarly, Mexican independence day was celebrated without the military march, but instead with

traditional music and dance, and it was held not in “neoliberal” time but at 11 p.m. (Davies, p.56-7).

“Be your own media”: Radio, Television and the Oaxacan Feminist Globalization Movement from Below

The theory of counterpublics critiques the normativity of Habermasian public sphere theory. This is particularly true when it comes to non-Western, nonbourgeois publics like those formed by indigenous peoples from Oaxaca, Mexico. Whereas the emergence of the public sphere in non-Western contexts is ascribed to new media (Internet and satellite T.V.), the Oaxacan case is noteworthy not only because we witness a different kind of publicness but also because this publicness uses old media in new ways. The Oaxaquen`os use of the radio and television shows how subaltern social movements work out the mediation of their movement. In other words, the Oaxaquen`os went back to their traditional way of engaging with modernity: Latin America is known for its political use of the radio by the miners and other indigenous communities.⁹ The innovative use of the media by the subaltern feminist global social justice movement from below became evident during the five month Oaxaca uprising of 2006. The role of community radio and television in the fight against neoliberalism in this struggle is particularly resonant because it comes after and in the neighborhood (both geographically and politically) of the 1994 Zapatista struggle, known for its supremely successful use of the Internet to arouse worldwide interest and garner support of indigenous issues.

Two documentaries made on the Oaxacan struggle—Jill Friedberg’s *A Little Bit of so Much Truth: Chronicle of a Rebellion in Oaxaca/Mexico* and Carlos Broun’s *The Power of Oaxaca’s Commune*—show that corporate media, both in Mexico as well as in the U.S., did nothing to help the Oaxaca movement; instead the corporate media spread the image of the movement as made up of malcontents who were breaking the law and resorting to violence. The mass media endlessly linked the civic struggle of the APPO and the education workers and armed revolutionary formations; the corporate media touted the small number of violent incidents, given the length of the movement, as “armed clashes” (a total of 26 people were killed during the five months, including Brad Will, a 36-year-old U.S. reporter for Indymedia on October 27th during a confrontation with police of Governor Ortiz), and in this way misrepresented the struggle as a face-off between two more or less comparably armed sides. The purpose was to create public opinion that a military crackdown was not only necessary, but desirable. Many in the movement suspected that the multitude of nonhierarchical popular assemblies, with maximum local autonomy, was perceived to be a threat to the capitalist system.

The two documentaries also bear testimony to a truly history-making use by the people of the media in Oaxaca. In the five month struggle in the summer of 2006, tens of thousands of school teachers, housewives, indigenous communities, health workers, farmers and students took over 12 radio stations and one T.V. station into

their own hands, using them to achieve the massification of the movement as well as to organize, mobilize, and ultimately defend their grassroots struggle for social, cultural, and economic justice. The APPO met and carried out its marches and demonstrations completely openly and with as much advance publicity as it could manage despite the attacks on its means of communication, and despite being treated by the state and federal governments as though it were a criminal organization.¹⁰ At the same time, the much more rapid and widespread communication network acted to inhibit the scale of government atrocities that might have been inflicted on this essentially nonviolent struggle.

As a globalization movement from below, the Oaxaca rebellion by subaltern classes included “students, artisans, professional groups, and particularly market women, [who] were [the] most active organizers and participants in the decisive marches and sit-ins,” and they gained the moral upper hand through nonviolence and strategic use of the mass media (Renique, p.2). One commentator suggests that as early as 2005, the movement worked towards the clandestine appropriation of the media, thereby subverting one of the ordering principles of society, when the teachers’ union established an unauthorized radio station, Radio Planton. The station operated from the union headquarters downtown (Martin, p.222). As one witness to the uprising put it, “The government and its corporate allies fully realize the importance of what people think. The media of communication are therefore a prime arena in the contest to influence peoples’ consciousness . . . the battle for the control of the media, and the airwaves in particular, is a critically important part of the popular struggle in Oaxaca” (Salzman in Davies, p.209-10). The Oaxaca movement has been called a communications war by Carlos Beas Torres, the leader of the Union of Indigenous Communities of the North Zone of the Isthmus, in an October 16 article, because of the number of indigenous community radio stations that were attacked and destroyed and also because indigenous women and other operators were terrorized and threatened during the struggle (Davies, p.139-40). The specific role of the women in this communications war is encapsulated in Raul Gatica’s words:

The central role of women has become visible, showing that they are not “typical” women in the kitchen, but that they are also in the street, working towards something. Women demonstrated that the media can be placed in the service of a cause and can be a bridge for information. Women demonstrated to the state and to the world how, when well used, the media generates consciousness and participation among people. (Martin, p.213)

The Oaxacan subaltern feminist movement took off, according to Carlos Broun’s documentary *The Power of Oaxaca’s Commune*, when APPO discussions began to concern themselves with questions of how to mobilize women and empower them. At the initial meeting, the men dominated, while the women present protested vigorously. Ultimately, it was decided that a minimum of 30 percent of the permanent council would be women. One woman in the doc-

umentary notes that women had always been there as good mothers taking care of the young, ensuring that everybody got to eat at the barricades, nobody got sick, etc. "But," she asks, "why do we always have to be the ones to serve people? As equals we too should build something with our hands." As a result, the Oaxacan Women's Coordinating Body was set up on August 1st. The first call by this committee to block the meeting of the Congress on August 2 mobilized 14,000 women who, in the style of the cooking pot march (*marcha de las caserolas*) made famous in Argentina, took to the streets with their pots, frying pans, and spoons to beat the slogan, "Governor Ruiz out!" Many women wore traditional aprons (like those worn by the street vendors in Oaxaca). About 350 women marched into the state television Channel 9 facilities demanding air time to broadcast their version of the APPO's uprising, while a thousand or more women and children stood on watch outside the building. When the station denied and threatened them, the Oaxacan Women's Committee took over the government radio station and Channel 9, an immense and important media complex that the former governor of Oaxaca, Ulises Ruiz, ran for his personal use. A woman involved in the takeover voices her reasons for her participation, "We were outraged with the coverage at CORTV; they never told the truth. They said that the alternative Guelaguetza was a failure; that really, deeply hurt" (Gibler, n. pag.). One woman APPO member in *The Power of Oaxaca's Commune* encapsulates the mood, "The women decided to stay here and recover the People's voices."

The channel went off the air, but within an hour they had one FM and AM radio station working, but not the television station. "It was obviously a tough situation because none of us knew how the media worked. But we set up commissions and an organizational structure." In addition they asked the listeners of Radio Universidad for help from people who knew how to operate television cameras. A spokeswoman said, "We are not afraid. Whatever happens, happens. We are fed up with this situation. We are fighting for our children. We women cannot stay home." At seven o'clock, television station Channel 9 went back on air. The first few shots included a shot of a group of women who demanded that Ruiz resign with an APPO movement banner which read, "When a woman advances there is no man who stays behind" (Davies, p.69, 71).

The radio is termed a "defense" by the movement members in the documentary, *A Little Bit of so Much Truth*, because it saved so many lives by warning them of dangers, the location of the attackers, and which cars were carrying innocents and should be allowed through the barricades. When the Federal Preventative Police entered Oaxaca on October 27, Radio Universidad was reminding the people to resist peacefully; it was calling on national and international organizations to express solidarity with the people of Oaxaca and broadcasting the messages from those organizations. On November 2, when Radio Universidad became the last strategic location, the people were asked by female broadcasters to come to the barricades to protect the voice of the people. After seven hours of confrontation, the police were forced to withdraw and Radio Universidad remained on air. Luis Hernandez Navarro, a journalist, is heard saying on cam-

era in *A little bit of so much truth* that the movement's rapid response and resistance capacity came from the radio, that "it would be hard to imagine (it otherwise)." Aldo Gonzalez Rojas of the Union de Organizaciones de la Sierra Juarez de Oaxaca notes, "The media outlets and especially the radio have played a fundamental role in strengthening the movement in Oaxaca."

In August 2006, for three weeks the Oaxacan Women's Committee occupied state television Channel 9 and its 96.9 FM radio station, and its radio and television programs aired discussions concerning the exploitation of Oaxaca under NAFTA, neoliberalism, globalization and Plan Puebla Panama.¹¹ Presentations were broadcast explaining capitalism, imperialism, genetically modified crops, the exploitative extraction of natural resources, and the denigration of women, while call-ins to the station from housewives and retired people discussed class differences, the World Trade Organization, and the benefits the rich receive. Some commentators ascribe to this flood of uncontrolled, unmediated, authentic communication among the population the effect of functioning as a deterrent on the ruling elite not to try a repetition of the heavy-handed attempt on June 14 to crush the now-massive movement when they destroyed a community radio station, Radio Planton. The indigenous forum that took place on November 28-9, 2006 in Oaxaca warned that "there are strong threats over the identity of the peoples, and the test of that is that many of the detained are teachers and students of indigenous communities of Oaxaca," and the way that the communities planned to combat this is by their vow to install as many as possible community radio stations to spread information (Davies, p.195).

The use of traditional media like the radio and the television does not mean the promotion of a singular media model for subaltern counterpublics. What it does reveal is that in subaltern resistance struggles we do not discern a linear progression; instead we find a recursive, reflexive, consolidatory movement. In globalism, it is not always the case that the new supersedes the old; sometimes new aspects of the old get highlighted. This is an aspect of postmodern pastiche. At the same time, some media forms like the community radio have transnational significance for alternative indigenous grassroots resistance movements: for instance, in a recent television interview Medha Patkar, the foremost woman activist identified with the Narmada Bachao Andolan (Save the Narmada Movement) in India, when asked about her ambitions for the future of the Narmada Movement, cites the desire for a community radio station for the Movement, in addition to other amenities like schools for the people displaced by the dam construction (July 12, 2008).

Nevertheless, some of the more doctrinaire commentators in *A little bit of so much truth* note that the primary reliance on the radio had the effect of always rallying the people to take immediate and direct action in Oaxaca. They describe the effect of the radio broadcasts as raising the spirits of the people, but not their consciousness. They point out that although the spontaneous nature of the movement justified certain mistakes, the radio programming "lacked content." By this they mean that the radio broadcasts did not fulfill the need to explain the reasons behind the movement, the movement's

dynamics and the objectives. Through this critique, the commentators are taking note of the fact that the community radio could have been put to work for indoctrination purposes of the movement, moving the struggle to another level. Instead, in taking over the media outlets, the subaltern resistance movement's spontaneous nature of the programming and exchanges worked primarily to provide people with experience, experience that is knowledge: "That is something you can't take away. The people learned how to use the media. And more than that they realized it is easy" (*A Little Bit of so Much Truth*).

But, contrary to claims by doctrinaire critics, actions did increase political consciousness. For example, the takeover and operation of Channel 9 was, according to the women producers in *The Power of Oaxaca's Commune*, "the most difficult task." They observe that they saw that TV wasn't like radio; they could not simply denounce things; they "needed to start using images," so that they could have an "impact and not limit ourselves." In fact, they "needed to include cultural content, things that state-run TV never did." They acknowledge, "We learned all that during the struggle." The result is described by one American observer:

What a vision of hope sprang from the screen those three weeks! Ordinary people in everyday clothes spoke of the reality of their lives as they understood them, of what neo-liberalism meant to them . . . of their loss of land to developers and international paper companies, of ramshackle rural mountain schools without toilets, of communities without safe water or sanitary drainage and so on—all the needs that could be met if wealth were not being stolen by rich capitalists and corrupt government agents. (Salzman in Davies, p.211-2)

The tenor of the discussions is reflected in the statement of one teacher who said, "Modernization and neoliberalism are not synonyms." People discussed the need for a new constitution: three thousand Oaxaquen'os responded to the first call of the APPO on November 10, to forge a new constitution for Oaxaca. The television broadcasts also broke barriers and created consciousness of comparable struggles at home and abroad: audiences watched uncensored, independent documentaries concerning brutal police repression in San Salvador, Atenco, and Oaxaca (Gibler, 2009); on one occasion, Channel 9 broadcast a documentary video of living conditions of Palestinians in the occupied territories (Davies, 85, 166). In this way, the Oaxacan Women's Committee advanced the political consciousness of their audience through expressing global solidarity with subaltern struggles all over the world.

In *The Power of Oaxaca Commune* the woman television producer, Paty, describes the experience: "We felt our strength growing. It wasn't just women anymore; teachers came, everyone joined us and congratulated the women that had taken control of the T.V. station. 'How wonderful! How brave! Better than the men. Thanks to everyone!'" As proof of the well-organized running of the television and the radio she cites their ratings: "And our rating was great! Chan-

nel 9's rating surpassed Televisa (the most important Mexican television network) and television Azteca."

The innovation in Oaxaca lies in the practice of direct, bottom-up democracy, as opposed to representative democracy where decent and dignified life for the subaltern peoples of the world is not possible within the confines of global capitalism. Thus, the Oaxacan subaltern indigenous globalization movement from below offers the world a new paradigm of both the form of the struggle and the form of organizing social life. The use of old and new media in subaltern feminist global social justice movements from below underlines the fact that in resistance movements there is always a dialectical traffic between the local and the international or global (this has come to be expressed in the clichéd phrase "glocalism") and the hybrid or *mestiza*, mixing the past (the premodern) and the modern, into the postmodern. The true binary is not globalization and antiglobalization but economic/corporate globalization versus globalization from below. This is the new internationalism. So just as there is no "the" public, there is no globalization in the singular, pro or anti, but multiple globalizations. In these contexts, the self-conscious translocal/transnational effect of mediation by the resistance movements breaks the ghettoization of regionalism, sexism, nationalism, and fundamentalism. The awareness of the translocal, international idiom of the media re-energizes and gives impetus to global resistance movements.

Notes

¹ The argument that we need to supplement a study of the bourgeois public sphere with a study of subaltern counterpublics that may be described as "nonliberal, nonbourgeois, competing public spheres" has been made by Fraser (1992, pp. 115, 123); see also Felski (1989, pp. 164-174) and Deem (1993, pp. 136-142). Fraser has been credited with the formulation that feminist movements are paradigmatic of the subaltern counterpublics. This use of the term subaltern by Fraser, borrowed from Spivak, but robbed of its postcolonial context and put to use by a first world intellectual for describing first world democracy, begs the question whether the descriptive empowerment exceeds the epistemic violence created by the borrowing.

² For this part of my argument I rely firstly on the theorization by Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri (2004) of the Multitude as a form of post-national, non-national, international, transnational, cosmopolitan, or global democracy. The constituent power of the multitude, itself realized by the changes associated with global post-fordism and the ascendancy of immaterial labour, provides the necessary conditions in which a truly global democracy is now a horizon of the possible. The networks of networks, and the movements of movements, which have emerged ever more frequently under the banner of social forums gives a partial figure to this conceptualization as a new model for organization of resistance against the global capitalist system. Second, I draw on Martin Barbero's notion of massification (1993), which refers not only to the process of migration to urban centres but also constitutes a response to the trans-nationalization of capitalist forces simultaneously bearing down on Latin America. Massification incorporates the popular classes into wider society through mass culture not simply through manipulation, but through "access to forms of expression" (p.159).

³ Fraser, an influential figure in the early conceptualization of the counterpublic sphere, in a recent interview describes the “historical shift” that “looms large” and that has influenced her most recent thinking: “the new salience of globalization, which is exploding the previously taken-for-granted idea that the bounded territorial state is both the appropriate frame for conceiving questions of justice and the proper arena for waging struggles to achieve it” (2007, p.74).

⁴ Through the “totalizing Marxist tradition of ideology critique” I refer to the postmodern critique of the totality and repression of such metanarratives like Marxist-Leninism. Postmodern radicalism is located in the following two realizations: (1) all metanarratives, including those of Marx himself, are idealist and totalizing; and (2) one must endorse Leftist, Social-Democratic politics as a practical negotiation in the everyday world.

⁵ Arendt makes these observations in the context of her study of the concept of totalitarianism ([1951] 1967). Accordingly, the amenability of European populations to totalitarian ideas was the consequence of a series of pathologies that had eroded the public or political realm as a space of liberty and freedom. These pathologies included the expansionism of imperialist capital with its administrative management of colonial suppression, and the usurpation of the state by the bourgeoisie as an instrument by which to further its own sectional interests. This in turn led to the delegitimation of political institutions and the atrophy of the principles of citizenship and deliberative consensus that had been the heart of the democratic political enterprise. The rise of totalitarianism was thus to be understood in light of the accumulation of pathologies that had undermined the conditions of possibility for a viable public life that could unite citizens, while simultaneously preserving their liberty and uniqueness (a condition that Arendt referred to as “plurality”).

⁶ For the death of postcolonial studies, see the May, 2007 issue of the journal PMLA. See also the recent collection of articles by Krishnaswamy and Hawley, *The Postcolonial and the Global* (2008), where the editors try to create a dialogue between the fields of postcolonial and globalization studies.

⁷ Lest we lose sight of the fact that even tradition is not exempt from the oppression of women, Weinberg points out, “In some 100 of the more than 400 Oaxaca municipalities governed by *usos y costumbres*, women do not vote in the village assemblies” (2007, p.401).

⁸ In contrast, commentators who identify themselves as autonomists and globophobes for whom the Oaxaca movement struck a chord, like Bina Darabzand from Iran who suggests in a radio interview that the Oaxaca rebellion, through the APPO, is a “living model” of the Athenian democratic republic of 2,500 years ago. Additionally, she notes that while the Oaxacans “might think they are going back to their cultural origins through these assemblies...in actuality they are moving towards socialism” (in Weinberg, 2007, p.402-3).

⁹ See all of Barbero’s writings on the subject as well as O’Connor (2004, 2006).

¹⁰ On May 22, 2006 by all estimates between 35,000 and 65,000 people from throughout the state occupied the center of Oaxaca City. Then the first of the megamarches on June 2 was attended by between 50,000 and 100,000 supporters (the police and Section 22 [the teachers’ labor union] estimates respectively); the second on June 7 with 120,000; the third on June 16 with 400,000 (according to www.narconews.com bulletin) (Davies, p.205, 207). On August 18, a nearly complete work stoppage involved eighty thousand workers (according to an estimate by *Noticias de Oaxaca*) (Davies, p.92). On September 21, about two thousand APPO members set out on a walk from the zocalo in Oaxaca City to the Zo’calo in Mexico City,

a distance of 506 kilometers, and more than 314 miles under a hot broiling sun.

¹¹ Plan Puebla Panama` is the neoliberal development megaproject of Oaxaca following WTO and World Bank demands, envisioned by transnational corporations and much promoted by the Mexican government, to construct a gigantic corridor of transportation, telecommunications, electricity, industry, pulp tree plantations, tourism, and more, that took communal land for private development and destroyed farmlands for highways running from Central America to the Mexican state of Puebla, just north of Oaxaca (Davies, 2007, p.18-9).

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- www.narconews.com (ongoing reports from Nancy Davies and others)
- www.salonchingon.com (video newsreels and more)



"Women face the Federal Preventive Police on the morning of October 29, 2006, as they prepare to enter Oaxaca City for the first time in the conflict." - Photo by John Gibler.