

Introduction

RETHINKING SOCIAL MOVEMENT TEMPORALITY AND SPATIALITY THROUGH COUNTERSPACE AND URBAN YOUTH CULTURE

WHEN I ARRIVED IN OAXACA to study the 2006 social movement described in the preface, I was prepared to study a series of events with a clear beginning and end. The violent eviction of striking teachers from their union encampment in the zocalo of the city on June 14, 2006, is generally understood as the beginning of the social movement that took grassroots control of the capital city for six months. Upon news of the attack against the teachers, thousands of Oaxacans rushed to the city center in their defense, forcing the overwhelmed police to retreat. The people then decided to remain in the zocalo and surrounding streets and public spaces indefinitely. As we will see in chapter 1, those spaces taken over by the teachers and their allies were incubators of what became a broad-based movement that included over three hundred existing movements and organizations, as well as countless individuals with no formal political affiliations. As far as the end of the movement, many commentators point to the month-long siege of Oaxaca by the Federal Preventative Police in October and November of 2006 that allowed the government to retake physical control of the city as marking the end.

Social movements, however, are rarely—if ever—so tidy as to have clear start and end dates. Similar to the law of conservation of energy, which states that energy can be transformed but not created nor destroyed, the energy that fuels mass mobilizations does not appear out of nowhere, nor does it disappear. It is shaped by prevailing grievances and harnessed from existing repertoires of contention (Tilly 1986). After peak mobilizations subside, that energy transforms into new forms of organizing and sparks new political imaginations and cultures. This dynamic is partially captured by the idea of “protest cycles,” which argues that the residue left behind by social movements, regardless of “success” or “failure,” influences subsequent waves of

protest (Tarrow 1998). Building on this idea, this book shows that it is necessary to reframe social movements themselves in ways that allow us to rethink the boundaries (both geographic and temporal) we assign to them.

Cartographies of Youth Resistance is a book about the life of social movements. This book shows how young people build on existing organizing traditions and experiment with novel political cultures to help sustain social movement energy through the ebbs and flows of peak mobilizations and visible movement activity. *Cartographies of Youth Resistance* does this by examining the transformation of social movement energy through an ethnographic focus on the production of space, youth culture, and radical politics. Looking at social movements through these interrelated processes instead of framing them as discrete objects illuminates their rhizomatic nature, historical antecedents, and long-term impacts. In order to examine these dynamics, I employ Henri Lefebvre's notion of *counterspace* (1991). I define *counterspaces* as spatial projects produced through the political imagination and practice of social movements, as an alternative to the spaces created by the dominant system.¹ This concept allows me to demonstrate how the power generated by social movements is spatialized and helps sustain activism through the ebbs and flows of mass mobilizations.

For example, chapter 1 introduces the reader to a youth-run social center that was opened after the Federal Preventative Police retook the city. At that point, militarization and police surveillance had made maintaining a visible dissident presence, such as through encampments and direct actions, too difficult and dangerous to sustain—especially for groups with little political capital. The increase in under-the-radar and quotidian organizing that happened in counterspaces like the social center was crucial in keeping the momentum from 2006 going, and these spaces also served as bases from which strategic direct actions could be staged when necessary.

The social center and other counterspaces discussed in this book were sites of what James C. Scott (1990) calls *infrapolitics*—the invisible struggles engaged in daily by marginalized groups. In Scott's formulation, marginalized people are fully aware of the imbalance of power, such that the decision to make their resistance invisible is a tactical one. Scott uses the terms *hidden transcripts* to frame the invisible daily practices through which marginalized people resist domination and *public transcripts* to frame the public performance of acquiescence. In this book, I look at what *infrapolitics* and their transcripts look like in space. I frame counterspaces like the youth-run social center as allowing activists to keep their quotidian organizing out of the

public eye (hidden transcript) while giving the appearance that the space around them is under control (public transcript). In other words, surveillance and militarization are “working” at squashing dissent. Focusing on counterspaces like the social center, together with the more spectacular spaces of social movements produced through direct actions and large mobilizations, yields a more complete picture of the life of social movements and of how power and resistance operate. Such a move allows us to heed Lila Abu-Lughod’s (1990) call for anthropologists to develop methodologies for the study of resistance as a diagnostic of power and the ever-shifting relations through which power is (re)produced and contested.

Oaxaca provides especially fertile ground for examining these dynamics, in part due to the effects that neoliberal development (including heritage tourism), militarization, and the criminalization of dissent have had on activism and the policing of public space. I refer to this confluence of forces as *neoliberal militarization*, whose intensification since 2006 has made maintaining a visible dissident presence increasingly dangerous. Youth have responded by seizing urban space through a novel repertoire of tactics and strategies, such as networking territorialized activist and artist spaces (e.g., social centers and cultural venues) with the ephemeral spaces constituted through direct actions (e.g., encampments, roadblocks) and public cultural production (e.g., murals, graffiti, stencil art, music). This book provides a cartography of those counterspaces, which are linked together to form constellations of resistance and creation. These activist constellations harness and sustain the energy of social movements, and the politics, cultures, and imaginations that fuel them.

Once we move beyond a view of social movements as discrete units, an important part of the story becomes the layering of histories of activism and, in places like Oaxaca, competing regimes of space making. The UNESCO World Heritage Site that includes Oaxaca City also includes the Zapotec archaeological site of Monte Albán. In present-day Oaxaca, then, the politics of heritage tourism involves histories and artifacts of pre-Hispanic and colonial space making, entangled with deepening geographies of inequality that push Indigenous migrants to the edges of the city—as well as to the edges of the economy, politics, and society. In part because of these histories, Oaxaca has also been the site of organized resistance for centuries—a legacy that the youth featured in this book claim as their inheritance. One way to envision this layering of activism and space is through the metaphor of the *palimpsest*, or the “layered space of movement, epochs, objects, information, and ideas,

actual, imposed, and superimposed” (C. A. Smith 2016, 62).² The metaphor of the palimpsest is based on the ancient practice of reusing parchment to produce new manuscripts by scraping off previous layers of text. Over time, the underwriting (*scriptio inferior*) would reappear, thus complicating the meaning of the manuscript page.

When applied as an analytic for understanding space and time, the palimpsest illuminates the horizontal and vertical entanglement involved in their production. Each layer and set of meanings is enmeshed in the previous iterations in ways that do not abide by the logics of linear time or Cartesian space (Alexander 2005, 190; C. A. Smith 2016, 63). Politics, after all, consists of multiple nonlinear temporalities (Draper 2018). The concept of the palimpsest allows me to chart how youth carve out space for themselves to be seen and heard in urban space, while not losing sight of the fact that they do so in a terrain shaped by centuries of colonial and state control, violence, and capitalist influence, as well as Indigenous and grassroots organizing and resistance.

OAXACA AS RACIALIZED SPACE OF UNGOVERNABILITY

Oaxaca’s Indigenous communities have resisted domination by outside forces for centuries—including incursions by other Indigenous groups like the Aztecs, as well as from Spanish colonizers and the Mexican state (Chassen de López 2004; Stephen 2002). The Ayuukjä’äy (Mixes, in Spanish) are an Indigenous group from the northern highlands of Oaxaca known as *los jamás conquistados* (never conquered). This nickname is said to refer to their successful defense against efforts by the Mexica (Aztecs), Zapotecs, and Mixtecs to absorb them as they spread their empires, as well as the inability of Spanish conquistadores and the Mexican army to exert control over them (Matías Rendón 2015). These histories of anticolonial, anti-imperial Indigenous resistance and the idea of being unconquerable is a source of great pride for many of the youth in this book—whether they are Ayuukjä’äy or not. Oaxaca is one of only two states in Mexico with a majority Indigenous population, according to government statistics.³ It is home to sixteen Indigenous groups, each with its own language and culture, making it both the most diverse state in Mexico and home to the most Indigenous-language speakers in the country (INEGI 2010). The visibility of the state’s Indigenous populations and their histories of resistance are used to fuel outside portrayals of Oaxaca

and its people as backward, ungovernable, and the “antithesis of modernity” (Chassen de López 2004, 4).

In 418 of the 571 municipalities in the state, the communal assembly is the official decision-making structure, and Indigenous customary law is constitutionally recognized. This means that governance through political parties and electoral politics takes place in only a minority of municipalities. For some, the absence of electoral politics in these territories reinforces long-held notions of Oaxaca as a racialized space of ungovernability and exposes the porous borders of Mexico’s postcolonial racial geographies (Saldaña-Portillo 2016). The formation of the Mexican state has relied on a temporal displacement of the Indigenous to the past, as well as racial geographies that relegate living Indians to rural territories, until or unless those territories are desired for their resources, at which point the Indigenous inhabitants are forced to flee (or migrate) to urban centers throughout Mexico and the United States. María Josefina Saldaña-Portillo reminds us that the settler colonial paradigm in Latin America renders Indigenous people “not properly Indian” when “they do not stay in their proper place,” such that land dispossession results in both a spatial displacement and an erasure of identity (2017, 153).

This book examines what happens when members of these Indigenous diasporas challenge the settler colonial paradigm by insisting that they are both urban and Indigenous. Moreover, for youth involved in the 2006 social movement and subsequent political projects, Indigenous governance through communal assembly and Indigenous customary law provide a model of politics otherwise. Indigenous self-governance as practiced in a majority of Oaxacan municipalities powerfully demonstrates the point that anthropologist Audra Simpson highlights in her study of Kahnawà:ke Mohawk politics: there can be “more than one political show in town” (2014, 11), and that can be a dangerous thing for the apparatus of electoral politics.

Although the Mexican state acknowledges the right of Oaxaca’s Indigenous communities to exercise customary law, this kind of politics of recognition is limited. Indigenous communities are not free, for example, from incursions and abuses by the Mexican military and police. Nor are they free from the nexus of neoliberal and neocolonial forces that seek to displace them from their land in order to extract valuable natural resources like gold, silver, marble, petroleum, and wind power, in the most recent iteration of the colonial project of extraction, dispossession, and elimination. The implementation of the Mesoamerica Integration and Development Project has given the political economy of extraction new life in the region since 2008. This

project connects Mexico, Central America, Colombia, and the Dominican Republic, facilitating neoliberal development based on foreign investment, privatization, and extraction of natural resources. Predictably, this has exacerbated human rights abuses, dispossession of Indigenous peoples' lands, and environmental degradation.⁴ Authoritarian governments and paramilitary forces in the region have responded to a groundswell in grassroots organizing against the development project by murdering dozens of Indigenous leaders, among them Bernardo Vásquez in Oaxaca and Berta Cáceres in Honduras (Bacon 2012; Jagger 2017; OAS 2017).

The enormous biological, cultural, and ethnic wealth of the state stand in stark contrast to the socioeconomic reality of most Oaxacans, whose state regularly ranks among the lowest in the nation in the Human Development Index and the highest in rates of infant mortality, maternal mortality, and domestic violence. While the Mexican government has long neglected Oaxaca and the majority of its inhabitants, the national and global shift toward neoliberal economic reforms exacerbated the long-standing social and economic despair in the state. As part of the economic restructuring adopted by the Mexican government in the 1980s and 1990s, the neoliberal state abandoned the countryside, gouging subsidies and other state supports for small- and medium-scale agriculture, while allowing subsidized US crops to flood the market. This shift has been devastating in states like Oaxaca, whose inhabitants have long counted on some combination of subsistence farming and small-scale commercial agriculture (e.g., coffee, corn, beans) (Bacon 2004; Barkin 2002; Fitting 2006; Gálvez 2018).

In addition to opening up communal lands to extractive development, the state and investors have focused on bolstering tourism. The tourist economy in southern Mexico is a product of neoliberal capitalism and relies on a trafficking of ideas around authenticity, indigeneity, cultural distinction, and nostalgia (Babb 2010; Poole 2011). Florence Babb argues that the state has “turned to tourism as both as a development strategy and as a way to refashion nationhood in a time of neoliberalism and globalization” (2010, 3). Tourism in Oaxaca relies heavily on the commodification of the state's cultural and ethnic diversity vis-à-vis the marketing of ethnic festivals, textiles, crafts, and other folklore. Oaxaca is also home to beautiful and undeveloped beaches, important and accessible archaeological ruins, and the picturesque historic city center. These qualities serve as the backbone of marketing campaigns encouraging tourists to visit the UNESCO World Heritage Site. In parallel with an increased reliance on tourism in the state, the neoliberal

abandonment of the countryside has fueled rural-to-urban migration and exacerbated neocolonial legacies of generational poverty and historic marginalization. These inequalities have made it difficult for the state and business interests to maintain the carefully crafted public spaces marketed to tourists. The response from the state has largely been to militarize those same spaces in an attempt to cleanse them of “indecent displays of political behavior” (Poole 2009, 199).

The current moment in Oaxaca and Mexico as a whole, which is characterized by the state’s embrace of certain neoliberal policies and ideas (such as tourism as development, ending subsidies for small- to medium-scale agriculture, and opening up communal lands for private ownership), coupled with increasing militarization and authoritarianism, leads to a confluence I term neoliberal militarization. Here I am in dialog with anthropologist Shannon Speed’s concept of neoliberal multicriminalism (2016). Speed developed this concept to highlight the current breakaway from the promises of neoliberal multiculturalism, such as human rights, democracy, and rule of law (Hale 2005), toward the abandonment of populations—especially Indigenous people—to market forces and illegal economies. With neoliberal multicriminalism, Speed also recognizes the simultaneous move toward higher levels of authoritarian governance and militarization. My use of neoliberal militarization builds on Speed’s theorization of the violent shift away from the unfulfilled promises of neoliberal multiculturalism with an explicit emphasis on the spatial manifestations of neoliberalism (displacement, crafting of tourist spaces, etc.) and of militarization (surveillance, policing of bodies and spaces, etc.).

THE UNGOVERNABLE IN AN ERA OF NEOLIBERAL MILITARIZATION

The initiatives launched by young people who came of political age during the Oaxacan social movement of 2006 shed light on possible paths forward for a generation of working-class, migrant, and racialized Mexican youth, who have few options for exercising citizenship or economic participation that allow them to escape the criminalization and surveillance that neoliberal militarization imposes. While the militarization of Indigenous regions in southern Mexico is nothing new (Stephen 1999), an unbridled militarization has exploded in Mexico under the guise of the drug war (*guerra contra el*

narcotráfico) declared by President Felipe Calderón upon taking office in 2006. Since then, the Mexican government has infused billions of dollars to bolster the military presence throughout the country, including over US\$1.6 billion in military aid from the United States under the bilateral Mérida Initiative (Ribando Seelke and Finklea 2017). Militarization is framed as the necessary response to drug trafficking and the unprecedented level of violence in Mexico. Moreover, under the Calderon and Peña Nieto administrations, the state declared a “state of exception” (resulting in such laws as the 2008 Penal Reform and 2017 Internal Security Law), which permits the government to suspend the constitutional and human rights of people accused of organized crime (Hernández Castillo and Speed 2012). Far from making citizens safer, the reforms have only fortified the carceral state (Speed 2016).

The exact human toll of the drug war is notoriously difficult to quantify, given its nebulous boundaries and government obstruction of investigations into the violence, but even conservative estimates put the numbers nationwide at over 100,000 deaths during 2006–16 (Lee and Renwick 2017), over 22,000 disappeared during 2006–14 (Tuckman 2015), and 281,418 people displaced during 2011–15 (CMDPDH 2015). Equally disturbing—and criminal—has been the state’s documented role in perpetuating the violence through extrajudicial killings, torture, disappearances, and arbitrary arrests (Human Rights Watch 2017). While seemingly indiscriminate and shockingly widespread, state violence touches certain communities more than others.⁵ Shannon Speed, among others, argues that Indigenous people are especially vulnerable to state violence under the guise of the drug war:

The Mexican state perpetrates violence against them [Indigenous people] through its discourses of criminality in the context of its charade of opposing drug trafficking. Agents of the state at all levels both act from and redeploy ideologies of race, class and gender in their acts of violence . . . and they do so comfortably in the context of ideologically generated impunity. (2016, 11)

A national security discourse that equates dissent with crime is layered over a centuries-old script that marks Indigenous bodies as “Other” and a seemingly universal trope that paints racialized youth as threats to public morality and safety. Bodies marked in these ways are deemed “ungovernable” (Reguillo Cruz 2012), which in turn justifies the continued militarization, surveillance, and enforcement of Mexico’s racialized geographies (Mora 2017) and the criminalization of the youth who inhabit them.⁶ *Cartographies of Youth Resistance* introduces readers to a network of Mexican youth that

actively challenge these forces through the construction of insurgent identities, spaces, and politics that were sparked during the extraordinary milieu of the 2006 social movement and that have been nurtured in the counterspaces produced and maintained by youth organizers in the years since then.

Social movements and activists have been criminalized by consecutive authoritarian regimes under the cover of the drug war (Hernández Castillo and Speed 2012). While the Mexican government has long practiced what political scientist Jonathan Fox (1994) calls authoritarian clientelism, where the state employs a parallel strategy of repression and co-optation to control political dissent, the current iteration of Mexican authoritarianism is especially widespread and brutal. National, international, and intergovernmental human rights organizations have denounced political repression as an increasing risk to Mexican democracy and human rights. The position of activists in the country has grown so perilous that the Mexican Commission on Defense and Promotion of Human Rights (La Comisión Mexicana de Defensa y Promoción de los Derechos Humanos) launched a program in 2013 specifically aimed at protecting activists. Oaxaca provides a window into how federal and state governments have used the war on drug trafficking as a pretext for cracking down on dissent. Despite not being a major theater in the official drug war, state violence in Oaxaca is rampant. Human rights reports have documented many such instances, including the 2006 crackdown on the social movement that left twenty-six people dead and hundreds more arrested and tortured (CCIODH 2008), and a 2016 police attack against protesting teachers and their allies in the town of Nochixtlán that left eight dead and dozens injured (Amnesty International 2017). A global report for 2017 listed Mexico as the third most deadly country in the world for human rights activists (Front Line Defenders 2017), with Oaxaca the deadliest state (López Dávila 2018).

The epidemic of violence in Mexico, in all its nefarious forms, disproportionately touches the lives of young people, and its effect is compounded by a wholesale disinvestment in their futures by the state through neoliberal cutbacks. More than 21 percent of Mexico's population between the ages of 15 and 29 is unemployed and not enrolled in school (Rocha 2011). In Oaxaca, an astounding 85.4 percent of the youth who are employed are found in the informal sector, including 67.1 percent of those with a college education (Guerrero 2017). Mexican journalist Ricardo Rocha (2011) calls these employment and education statistics "only the most visible data of the collective crime that this country commits against its youth every

day,” citing the fact that homicide is the leading cause of death for youth. The murder of Mexican youth has become so widespread that scholars and human rights activists refer to them as *juvenicidios* (Valenzuela Arce 2015). Affronts against the dignity and lives of Mexican youth are even more severe and pervasive for Indigenous, migrant, and racialized youth. This includes unequal access to schooling, safe housing, dignified employment, and health care; the effects that discrimination and surveillance take on the body, mind, and overall well-being (Browne 2015; Fanon [1967] 2005); and more obvious manifestations of violence that result from an uninterrupted colonial logic that constructs Indigenous bodies as legitimate targets for physical attacks (Mora 2017; Stephen 1999). Moreover, the epidemic of gendered violence, and femicide in particular, that has spread throughout the country has not spared Oaxaca. In fact, Oaxaca is one of the deadliest states for women, and impunity for gendered violence against Indigenous women is particularly rampant (Speed 2016, 6). In these ways and others, physical violence and social death are the specters that loom over the lives of the youth in this book.

The histories and counternarratives of the generation of youth that came of political age during the Oaxacan social movement of 2006, however, shed light on how Mexican youth are constructing alternatives to death and despair for themselves, for each other, and for their communities. *Cartographies of Youth Resistance* frames their collective projects as correctives to narratives of youth apathy that dominate national commentary. Far from apathetic or hopeless, the youth organizers whose stories fill the pages of this book are engaged in the everyday work of creating social change, and through their collective political and social projects they place electoral politics and neoliberal policies on trial for failing to offer meaningful solutions, hopeful futures, and channels for substantive participation for youth.

INSURGENT INDIGENEITY, YOUTH CULTURE, AND SOCIAL MOVEMENT ORGANIZING

This book examines what happens when the forces of neoliberal militarization collide with social movements. This is a story of radical hope, imagination, and creation. The protagonists are Indigenous and migrant youth in Mexico who combine horizontal organizing and urban autonomy practices with hip-hop and punk culture to create meaningful channels for political and social participation. They are largely first- or second-generation migrants