

The logo for the Anthropology Book Forum is located in the top left corner of a dark blue header. It features a stylized, light blue circular graphic with concentric, overlapping lines that resemble a spiral or a network. To the right of this graphic, the text "Anthropology Book Forum" is written in a white, bold, sans-serif font.

# Anthropology Book Forum

Open Access Book Reviews

Decolonizing the politics of resistance in Oaxaca, and elsewhere

Review by Myriam Lamrani

MAURICE RAFAEL MAGAÑA, 2020, *Cartographies of Youth Resistance. Hip-Hop, Punk, and Urban Autonomy in Mexico*. Oakland, California: University of California Press, 206 pp., ISBN 978-0-52034-462-4

*Cartographies of Youth Resistance* is a rare book, one that takes the reader immediately into the thick of the ethnographic action, in Oaxaca de Juárez, Mexico. We discover Generation 2006 during its political awakening as the youth participates in what some have called the “first insurrection of the twenty-first century” (Osorno 2007)—a violent confrontation between the people and the authorities in Oaxaca, which lasted more than seven months. It is an understatement to say that 2006 was a formative period for the youth that took the streets. It did not only change this generation, but it also transformed the social fabric of Oaxaca forever.

A case in point, the present book takes us on an exploration of the dense and rhizomatic networks that developed as people took the streets. From representatives of indigenous communities and migrants to the youth involved in the punk and hip-hop scenes and Street Art/Graffiti movements, we discover an earnest portrayal of indigenous identity, with its complex connections to rural communities, migration to the US, and the Mexican nation. The book itself is a network of some sort, each chapter seamlessly blending into the other, developing each argument in greater detail.

The opening scene, dense in textures, sets the tone of what follows, a *thick* ethnography. Heir of what Chicano poet and anthropologist Renato Rosaldo (1994) aptly called “deep hanging out,” *Cartographies* describes political struggle through

the voices of the youth that occupied the *zócalo* (the city's main square, a space for popular politics, declared a World Heritage Site by the UNESCO) while defending the city's barricades some 15 years ago and that, to this day, remain active political actors.<sup>1</sup> The level of repression during 2006—of which the reader perceives an eerie echo today as protests rage in our pandemic-ridden world—provides the context of the coming of age of that youth, as they become revolutionary agents.

The opening chapter outlines the history of the movement. Setting the coordinates of the book, it presents some of the key players of the uprising, such as the Sección 22 (Local 22), the local branch of the SNTE (National Educational Workers Union), and the APPO (Popular Assembly of the Peoples of Oaxaca). It then moves swiftly on considering how the use of grassroots radio and online television stations, the execution of state functions (e.g. governance, policing, and trash collection), protest art, barricades, as well as the occupations of streets and buildings helped foster intergenerational networks of political action. These “laboratories of radical imagination” provide the backbone of the author's argument on how the occupation of spaces enabled a dialogue between the youth and older members of society, creating networks of solidarity while shaping political subjectivities.

Space making materializes as one of the core concerns at the heart of this book as the second chapter takes us to the occupation of two collective social and cultural “counterspaces” (Lefebvre 1991)—VOCAL and CASOTA—which provided the grounds where 2006 political actors reframed indigeneity. Temporality is also a crucial dimension of Magaña's exploration of the new political horizons in the years that followed the upheaval. This spatial-temporal conjuncture is theorized here as a palimpsest namely, a super-imposition of epochs, movements, ideas/information, and objects (3–4) which disproves linear thinking. Through this multidimensional and intergenerational approach to horizontal political dissent, we discover the mutually constitutive relation between rural movements of resistance and emergent urban indigenous and migrant political identities. Anchoring these networks in the idiom of *comunalidad*—indigenous communal life, identity, and epistemology (71)—Magaña's move to decolonizing anarchism and the politics of resistance is a much-welcomed theoretical intervention. Chapter 3 carries the above conversation by linking social movements to transient spaces of direct political action, as they

transform to become longer-lasting laboratories of horizontal politics. Returning to the cases of VOCAL and CASOTA, this chapter brings into clearer focus the importance of spatiality and temporality in challenging established structures of power. Moving from the *zócalo* to the counterspaces—central to the ideas of “decolonial anarchism and urban autonomy” (102)—, we realize how such spaces fostered and strengthened existing social and political relationships.

Chapter 4 takes us in the thick of a very rich ethnography illustrating the dialectic of space and official structures of power through everyday political action. Through three vignettes, we observe the tensions that arise in the organization of mass mobilizations in the city center while the concept of “network” that guides this book starts to develop more pointedly. Evoking David Graeber’s (2011: 57) work on Direct Action Network, the reader grasps that: “One must be able to imagine oneself and others as integrated subjects in order to be able to produce beings that are in fact endlessly multiple, imagine some sort of coherent, bounded 'society' in order to produce that chaotic open-ended network of social relations that actually exists.” That is exactly what Magaña shows with great ethnographic sensitivity. Exploring the power dynamics playing out in these public spaces, we witness frictions and “spatial disruption” but also the solidarities and collective practices at the core of political actions through the lenses of the palimpsest and “rebel aesthetics.” As physical counterspaces fade into the background, Chapter 5 leads us on the streets of Oaxaca with two graffiti crews (AKA Crew and Arte Jaguar) and local anarchist and punk movements. Whilst rebel aesthetics take center-stage by *visually* appropriating Oaxaca to disrupt the dominant spatial-political and cultural order (while still upholding some aspects of individualism and patriarchy) the mounting militarization and state surveillance, which undergird control over public spaces, becomes more apparent. Triggering the forced reorganization of autonomous and horizontal politics as collectives close their spaces down, the youth’s political future may seem bleak. But, as Magaña concludes, the movements—sometimes co-opted by the neoliberal market or retreating to rural communities—do not so much disappear as they transform to constitute the aesthetics of future radical imagination, and the legacy of the 2006 Generation.

This book is a crucial addition to the study of political protests and revolutions, for researchers working in Oaxaca or Mexico and beyond these geographical borders. The author's clear decolonizing agenda shows him accomplishing the rare feat of "walking the talk." Magaña does so through a thorough engagement with his collaborators in the field (one has the sense that they are on equal terms). Skillfully interweaving the voices and sovereignty of his interlocutors and their politics of indigeneity to a wide scholarship, he builds his theoretical argument on a widely decentralized scholarship across the proverbial Western "pond."

To anthropologists having conducted fieldwork in Oaxaca, the book is an ethnographic treasure-trove. Rich in information, it sheds light on the complexity of local politics and social movements. More than anything else, it is the depth of Magaña's analysis, capturing the youth's interconnected understanding of race, politics, and subcultures, that makes this book a must-read for researchers of social movements in the Americas, and beyond. *Cartographies* also has the virtue of depicting an unflinching portrayal of the politics of race in Mexico that does not essentialize indigeneity for the reader but takes her deep into the intricacies of indigenous identity with ethnographic mastery. It is a truly beautifully written book—yet unromantic— an eye-opener for any researcher of grassroots movements.

One might be left longing for more sustained development of "decolonial anarchism" beyond Mexican borders, or even hope to come across additional lyrics and trivia of the Oaxacan punk and (especially) the hip-hop scene. However, Magaña's sound theoretical intervention that illuminates the afterlives of the 2006 social movements makes up for these very negligible shortcomings, which may just as well be a caprice of a reader nostalgic of the youth and political promises held by the 2006 uprising.

Coined by Renato Rosaldo in 1994, the term “deep hanging out” describes an anthropological method and a more involved form of participant-observation, where the anthropologists immerse themselves in their field as opposed to conducting short interviews with interlocutors. The term was subsequently used by and wrongly attributed to Clifford Geertz (1998).

## REFERENCES

Geertz, Clifford. 1998. Deep hanging out. *New York Review of Books* 45 (16): 69–72.

Graeber, D. 2011. *Revolutions in Reverse. Essays on Politics, Violence, Art, and Imagination*. London: Minor Compositions.

Osorno, Diego. 2007. *La primera insurrección del siglo XXI*. Mexico City: Random House Mondadori.

Rosaldo, Renato. 1994. “Anthropology and ‘the Field’.” Conference held at Stanford University and UC Santa Cruz. February, 18-19.

**Myriam Lamrani** is a multimodal anthropologist whose work focuses on revolutionary politics, nationalism, intimacy, and images. She conducted her doctoral research (UCL, 2018) on images of death, devotion, violence, and nationalism in Oaxaca, Mexico as a member of the ERC project: *Comparative Anthropologies of Revolutionary Politics* (CARP – 2014-2019). She is the co-winner of the *J.B. Donne Essay Prize on the Anthropology of Art* (2019) and an Honorary Research Fellow at University College London. As of September 2021, she will work on nationalism through images of migration, comparing Greece and Mexico, as a Marie Skłodowska Curie Fellow at Harvard University (2021).

