

John Gledhill and Patience A. Schell, eds. *New Approaches to Resistance in Brazil and Mexico*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2012. 398 pp. \$28.95 (Paperback). ISBN: 978-0-8223-5187-0.

For several decades, “resistance” has been an important topic in the humanities and social sciences. Scholars have yet to reach a consensus, however, on what phenomena the term should describe and which groups and individuals are worthy of attention. This volume makes a significant contribution to the debate through a number of case studies in Brazil and Mexico. Historians and anthropologists working in these two countries will find the work of particular value, but it will also be useful for scholars of Latin America in all disciplines and for general readers interested in resistance studies.

John Gledhill’s introduction, “A Case for Rethinking Resistance,” provides an excellent background to the topic and a nuanced reflection on the volume’s engagement with existing scholarship. “Resistance” calls to mind the struggle of the disadvantaged for equality, justice, and dignity. Nonetheless, resistance studies have received criticism for romanticizing their objects of inquiry and for offering moral lessons instead of reasoned explanations. Therefore, following thinkers such as Foucault, Gramsci, and Bourdieu, Gledhill argues that “the study of resistance should be embedded in more complex accounts of the practices of power” (3). In order to expand upon James Scott’s influential studies of “everyday forms of resistance” (1985; 1990), Gledhill turns to Sidney Tarrow’s concept of “contentious politics,” which allows for the analysis of social movements and of power relations between subaltern groups and other actors.

The chapters are organized into three parts, each dedicated to a certain aspect of resistance. Part One, “Resistance and the Creation of New Worlds,” focuses on the agency of indigenous and African peoples in colonial societies. In Ch. 1, “Rethinking Amerindian Resistance and Persistence in Colonial Portuguese America,” John Monteiro provides a valuable discussion of indigenous identity formation and the colonial roots of contemporary “ethnogenesis.” Ch. 2, “Rituals of Defiance: Past Resistance, Present Ambiguity,” reviews images of Mexico’s colonial past. Felipe Castro Gutiérrez points out the great variation in the degree of resistance among indigenous actors in the colonial period. In Ch. 3, “Indian Resistances to the Rebellion of 1712 in Chiapas,” Juan Pedro Viqueira shows how, even in a case of extreme polarization, the behavior of subaltern groups was far from homogenous. Ch. 4, “The ‘Commander of All Forests’ against the ‘Jacobins’ of Brazil: The *Cabanada*, 1832-1835,” explores how subalterns made use of clientelistic networks. Marcus J. M. de Carvalho also looks at the role of personal bonds in resistance and rebellion. In Ch. 5, “A ‘Great Arch’ Descending: Manumission Rates, Subaltern Social Mobility, and the Identities of Enslaved, Freeborn, and Freed Blacks in Southeastern Brazil, 1791-1888,” Robert W. Slenes argues that common experience moved plantation slaves to form a class-based identity.

Part Two, “Resisting through Religion and for Religion,” fills a gap in the literature by studying the role of religion in motivating and sustaining resistance. In Ch. 6, “Millenarianism, Hegemony, and Resistance in Brazil,” Patricia R. Pessar focuses on multiple conservative resistance movements in the 19th and 20th centuries. Ch. 7 asks “Where Does Resistance Hide in Contemporary Candomblé?” Luis Nicolau Parés examines different kinds of resistance along a continuum of elite and small temples, with differing degrees of involvement with the Brazilian government. In Ch. 8, “Catholic Resistances in Revolutionary Mexico during the Religious

Conflict,” Jean Meyer uses Martin Broszat’s concepts of “Widerstand” (armed conflict) and “Resistenz” (peaceful opposition) to account for pacific resistance in certain regions of Mexico. Ch. 9, “Gender, Resistance, and Mexico’s Church-State Conflict,” studies a bourgeois Catholic women’s group within the same time period. Patience A. Schell makes the important argument that identity is not fixed and that there are multiple ways of being a subaltern.

Part Three, “Rethinking Resistance in a Changing World,” considers the effects of neoliberalism and the “politics of difference” on the possibilities for resisting. In Ch. 10, “Tracing Resistance: Community and Ethnicity in a Peasant Organization,” Margarita Zárata studies a rural movement in Mexico that recovered and updated indigenous practices in order to confront capitalism. Ch. 11, “Resistance, Factionalism, and Ethnogenesis in Southern Jalisco,” explores “ethnic resistance” both in agrarian conflict and in daily negotiations among actors. Guillermo De la Peña calls attention to contexts, relationships, and shifting identities while pointing out the great individual variation in resistance. In Ch. 12, “The Transhistorical, Juridical-Formal, and Post-Utopian Quilombo,” Ilka Boaventura Leite explains the multiple definitions of the term “quilombo,” its connotation of resistance, and its relationship to Brazilian racial and ethnic identity. In Ch. 13, “From Resistance Avenue to the Plaza of Decisions: New Urban Actors in Salvador, Bahia,” Maria Gabriela Hita reveals how official recognition and the entanglement with the state that it entailed affected a neighborhood’s long-held identity of resistance. Ch. 14, “Contestation in the Courts: The Amparo as a Form of Resistance to the Cancellation of Agrarian Reform in Mexico,” argues against a subaltern/elite binary. Helga Baitenmann calls attention to disputes within and between rural population centers. In Ch. 15, “Beyond Resistance: Raising Utopias from the Dead in Mexico City and Oaxaca,” Matthew Gutmann rejects romanticism and analyzes “failed” resistance, insisting on the need to understand not only concrete power relations but also whether subalterns are to blame for their misery, cooptation, and duplicity.

In the volume’s thought-provoking conclusion, “Rethinking Histories of Resistance in Brazil and Mexico,” Alan Knight reflects on the roles of intentionality, scale, and ideology when classifying activities as “resistance.” Like Gutmann, Knight criticizes romanticism and encourages scholars not to “whitewash” the mistakes and shortcomings of subalterns.

One of this volume’s greatest strengths is its attention to context and avoidance of facile generalization. Despite focusing on Brazil and Mexico, the contributors understand that these two countries do not exhaust the immense variation within Latin America. The volume’s discussion of how gender, class, race, and ethnicity affect resistance is another strong point. Non-specialist readers will be grateful for the definition of terms in Spanish and Portuguese and the frequent inclusion of background information.

Although the three parts produce a coherent whole and the authors often trace connections to material covered by other contributors, this volume is comparative only to a certain extent. With very few and relatively minor exceptions, the chapters focus on either Brazil or Mexico and do not make detailed comparisons. This is not necessarily a weakness, however, as the juxtaposition of diverse topics encourages readers to consider the similarities and differences between the countries, as well as the implications for theorization on resistance in general.

Steven B. Wenz  
Vanderbilt University