

INTRODUCTION

Talk of U.S. imperialism, long marginalized as a rhetorical excess of the “old Left,” has made a mainstream comeback over the past few years. It has been brought back into fashion not by critics of imperialism, but by those who strongly believe that the United States has an imperial right and obligation to act as global guarantor not only of its own interests but also of the interests of the entire global community. The world’s strongest “market democracy,” this sentiment holds, has the ability, the authority, and, above all, the responsibility to forcefully promote the spread of democratic institutions, private investment, and a secure and stable world order.

While this imperial sentiment had been growing since the Clinton era, it bloomed after the attacks of 9/11, especially in neoconservative circles, and many felt called upon to celebrate its “coming out of the closet.”¹ Max Boot, a senior fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations, commented that while many opted for euphemisms in describing the U.S. role in the world, he preferred “the more forthright if also more controversial term American Empire . . . sort of like the way some gays embrace the ‘queer’ label.”

The “more forthright term,” now out of the closet, has been filtering into many corners of the ideological spectrum. In early 2003, for example, while promoting his book on the recent U.S. interventions in Bosnia, Kosovo, and Afghanistan, the liberal human-rights scholar Michael Ignatieff told a *Boston Globe* columnist that in some places in the world, “empire”—of the “lite,” benevolent variety—had become “the last hope for democracy and stability alike.”²

This sentiment played no small part in the subsequent unfolding of events in the Middle East. The invasion of Iraq seems to have been envisaged by at least some of its proponents as an easy first step toward bringing current imperial values—(constrained) free elections, (selective) free markets, and (U.S.-dominated) international security—to the Arab world, all accompanied, of course, by U.S. control of the world’s second-largest oil reserves.

This view of empire has a long history within the Americas, where imperial practice and ambition have long shaped the construction of North American power. In fact, the historical role of the United States in the Western Hemisphere may well serve as a useful model for the kind of U.S. presence desired and celebrated (no matter how badly things may have gone lately) by the current proponents of empire. Long before the present-day excesses of neoconservative rule, the United States had considered it a right and a duty to exercise dominance over its “sister republics” in the Americas and to intervene when necessary to pursue its own interests, as well as to protect the “sovereignty” of those sister republics in the face of intrusion by other imperial powers. It also felt compelled to intervene when those republics faced threats from within, like homegrown communists, land reformers, labor leaders, indigenous activists—or drug lords.

Indeed, the centennial commemoration of the Roosevelt Corollary to the Monroe Doctrine occurred in 2004. “Chronic wrongdoing,” President Theodore Roosevelt told the U.S. Congress in December 1904, “or an impotence which results in a general loosening of ties of civilized society may in America, as elsewhere, ultimately require intervention by some civilized nation”—namely, “however reluctantly,” the United States.³ As argued by Alan Knight in this volume’s lead chapter, Washington has sought to carry out these interventions without constructing a formal empire as such. The U.S. empire, in Knight’s classification of imperial modalities, has been an “informal” one, shaping the activities of its fellow American states to its own interests by means of its superior force, together with its economic, political, and cultural dominance.

Over the past century, that is, it has been U.S. policy not simply to protect its neighbors from foreign and/or evil empires (what Knight calls the “defensive” function of empire) but to exercise sufficient control over those neighbors in order to maintain U.S.-defined ties of civilization (what he calls the “engineering” function of empire). It has accomplished this by way of strategic, selective intervention, making use of what Knight refers to as the political, economic, and cultural *mechanisms* that work to fulfill the *functions* of empire. Those mechanisms are meant to increase the probability that the “ties of civilized society” will strengthen when the United States approves of actions taken by her sister republics.

The historian Greg Grandin has suggested elsewhere that, beyond its long history, U.S. imperial practice in the Americas has served as a “trial run” of sorts for the exercise of power elsewhere in the world.⁴ In his recent book, *Empire’s Workshop*, Grandin emphasizes both the informal and the indirect nature of much of this imperial practice, which has involved the delegation of imperial responsibility to local elites. This has been especially true of the farming out of imperial violence, a process known to Pentagon hands as the “Salvador option,” after its successful use in combating El Salvador’s leftist insurgency in the 1980s. The “Salvador option,” discussed by Grandin in *Empire’s Workshop*, thus refers to the use of native militaries and paramilitaries to do the hands-on work of imperial maintenance.⁵

And if the “Salvador option” refers to the farming out of violence, one can talk about an even more powerful “Chile option” as the farming out of economic policy. My use of the term refers to the effectiveness of training local elites to think like imperial elites in the realm of economic theory. Trained in the most “free-market” versions of neoclassical economics, Chilean economists stood ready to privatize, deregulate, remove protections, and open the economy to the easy entrance of transnational (mostly U.S.) capital once the way had been cleared by the U.S.-supported coup led by General Pinochet. “How we have come full round to the free-market absolutism now being imposed on Iraq is the back-story of our times,” writes Grandin. “In important ways the road to Iraq passes through Latin America, starting first in Chile.”⁶ Indeed, in the “Chile option,” one sees the political (the coup), the economic (the dismantling of a social economy), and the cultural (learning how to think) mechanisms working hand-in-hand to benefit the imperial relationship.

These imperial mechanisms are reflected in U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice’s repeated insistence in her talks to Latin American

audiences that Washington, as a democratic power, would have no choice but to “permit” elected leftist governments to take office and allow them to remain there so long as they chose to govern within a “democratic structure,” leaving it quite clear who got to define “democratic structure.” (This framework, of course, is relatively new. Back in the days of the Cold War, U.S. national security always trumped any notion of democracy promotion.) Democracy is a universal value, Rice now wants to be understood as saying, and the United States, as the region’s benevolent great power, will do its best to protect its neighbors’ ability to attain and maintain democracy, strategically intervening when governments stray from the democratic path. Implicit in this interpretation is the idea that relations between neighboring nations will also take place within a framework of institutional, democratic relations. But, for many of those neighbors, the story has always been a bit more complicated.

On 10 March 2005, for example, in a visit little noticed outside of Mexico, Rice met with Mexico’s foreign minister Luis Ernesto Derbez in order to resolve a long-simmering dispute between the two countries regarding Mexico’s “water debit” under a complicated water-rights treaty. Her seven-hour visit to Mexico resulted in the host country’s agreement to deliver 716,000 acre-feet of river water to the United States by September of that year, thus honoring a 1944 treaty on the sharing of the water flowing along the common border between the two countries.

On the same visit, Rice dismissed Mexico’s complaint that Washington had recently violated international law by abruptly withdrawing from the Optional Protocol of the Treaty of Vienna, which gives the United Nations International Court of Justice the authority to intervene in cases in which individuals imprisoned in foreign countries have not had the ability to consult with their own consular officials. Under that authorization, the court had recently directed a “meaningful review” of fifty-one convictions and sentences of Mexican citizens condemned to death in the United States, none of whom had been given the opportunity to consult with a consular official. Following that decision, Washington announced that it would simply remove itself from the court’s jurisdiction.

“We will continue to believe in the importance of consular notification,” said Secretary Rice in the run-up to her Mexico City meeting, but international court jurisdiction had “proven inappropriate for the United States.”⁷ Rice effectively told the Mexicans: while you folks have a water treaty to

live up to, we can simply withdraw from any signed agreement we find “inappropriate.” Rice displayed no embarrassment about the contradiction. On the contrary, one of the objectives of her visit was precisely to confirm those different levels of obligation. It was a useful demonstration of the maintenance of U.S. dominance in the Americas.

This kind of routine imperial maintenance has long generated multifaceted resentment and opposition in the hemisphere. This “dissent” has been evident in the many attempts by one or another of the “sister republics” to pull away from U.S. dominance and in the widespread manifestations of popular discontent and unrest directed against U.S. power.

Empire and Dissent examines precisely that dynamic: the interaction of imperial power with the dissent and resistance it has engendered. The contributors to this volume examine the question of “empire,” the various forms of resistance, dissent, and/or accommodation it generates, and the ways it has manifested itself in the Americas. They explore the ways in which the contours of dissent and resistance have been generated by the activities of empire, as well as the ways in which the contours of empire have been given shape by opposition, resistance, and disaffection.

Since the book approaches its primary concern—U.S.-hemispheric relations at the beginning of the twenty-first century—with a historical perspective, it is divided into two sections: in part I Alan Knight, Gregory Dowd, John Oldfield, and Carlos Marichal examine empire and dissent through a historical lens; in part II the analysis moves to present-day conflicts within the hemisphere, with essays on various kinds of dissent (and, in some cases, accommodation) in Mexico (Neil Harvey), Bolivia (Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui), Brazil (Jeffrey Rubin), Argentina (Daniel Cieza), and Venezuela (Steve Ellner). The volume thus addresses the exercise of, dissent from, and resistance to imperial rule in a variety of settings, ranging from historical assessments of imperial rule in the Americas to analyses of some very different contemporary forms of domination and dissent. The contributors do not take the question of empire as a given, but rather probe its meanings and applications as a descriptive term for U.S.-hemispheric relations and, more generally, for the interplay of certain economic and cultural relations in the Americas.

Knight’s lead chapter, an inquiry into the nature of imperial domination by way of a close historical examination of U.S. and British empires, sets the tone and provides a schematic framework within which the succeeding

essays, both historical and contemporary, can be best understood. Knight's essay is immediately followed by three chapters that continue the historical inquiry into the nature of empire: Dowd on the conflict-laden relationship between eighteenth-century empire-building settlers and Native Americans; Oldfield on the imperial setting of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century dissent against Britain's slave trade; and Marichal on the use of financial power to bolster U.S. imperial domination in the second half of the twentieth century.

Both Dowd and Oldfield are concerned with, among other things, the cultural dimensions of imperial domination, specifically with the racial conceptions of subjected peoples held not only by ruling elites but by other, less-privileged members (or subjects) of the imperial power. Dowd discusses Native American resistance to colonial rule as generated for the most part by the inferior, subcitizen status in which they were held. This status was imposed on Native Americans in part because it was functional to their imperial subjection. By the late eighteenth century, writes Dowd, "a long history of colonial slavery and Indian dispossession had encouraged the development of notions of savagery and race that made some Britons openly question the Indians' readiness or even capacity for civility."

Oldfield writes about the shifting sentiment within the imperial power—once again, Great Britain—about the human status of the African slaves brought to the Americas, upon whom so much of England's imperial expansion rested. Indeed, the British empire's internalization of the belief that subjected populations are not qualified to retain anything but a subcitizen status has long played a role in the formation of structures of power. When that belief erodes, so, frequently, does the domination.

The question of "status" thus becomes an important subtheme of this book. A great deal of dissent in the Americas has lately taken the form of a militant assertion of humanity and citizenship by racially and ethnically excluded populations, and the chapters in part II discuss that phenomenon in Bolivia, southern Mexico, Brazil, and (with a strong component of social class) Venezuela. The issue of status extends throughout the volume in discussions of organized dissent and is especially significant in Harvey's chapter on Mexico's Mayan Zapatistas and Rivera Cusicanqui's discussion of Bolivia's Aymara and Qhichwa *cocaleros*.

In all these cases, the cultural mechanism of imperial engineering (if I may borrow Knight's terminology) attempts to link desired behavior to a

certain set of cultural norms and to judge those norms deficient if they do not produce the behavior that is functional to empire. Thus, Rivera Cusicanqui's interpretation of the confrontation between empire and indigeneity in Bolivia grimly echoes Dowd's description of a similar confrontation in North America two centuries earlier. "The idea that in Bolivia," writes Rivera Cusicanqui, "the rural and urban indigenous people who led the October revolt against the government of Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada or voted massively for Evo Morales's Movement Toward Socialism Party (MAS) were 'archaic' or 'backward'—that they were resisting modern market discipline in a kind of cultural or racial atavism—is a part of unquestioned common sense among the elites, as much in Bolivia as in the developed world."

Sources of Domination

As the essays in this volume make clear, hemispheric domination today flows both from the U.S. state apparatus and from transnational sources of power. On the one hand is the informal U.S. empire itself: Washington's determination to maintain its dominant position within the hemisphere. On the other hand is the supremacy of "the markets," frequently presented by pro-market ideologues as a kind of domination by nature, or by "reality." Critics, of course, see market domination not as a natural, but as a historical phenomenon, not as control by the abstract forces of supply and demand, but rather by those who have inordinate power within the interplay of market forces—namely, the (loosely constructed) capitalist class.

In some recent debates over globalization, as both Harvey and Ellner remind us, the ascendancy of the markets—or of capital—has been held to be the paramount form of domination in the contemporary world. In the recent work of Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, for example, this phenomenon has been referred to simply as "Empire," a global construction with no necessary geographic or political modifier.⁸ For Hardt and Negri, "Empire" is a global network of domination by an essentially transnational capitalist class that recognizes no geographical boundaries. It is a network that constantly reorganizes the logic of work, civic participation, and daily life on a worldwide basis.

This analysis has had important implications for the political organization of dissent, leading away from a focus on achieving state power (which would presumably leave one subject to the dictates of transnational capital) and toward an attempt to confront capital from below with like-minded

national and transnational allies. Further, Hardt and Negri assert, just as the decentralized structure of transnational capital stands in stark contrast to the centralized structure of the imperial state, so, too, must contemporary dissident and revolutionary movements transform their vertical, centralized structures into decentralized bodies that link to one another horizontally across national and transnational space. As detailed by Harvey in chapter 5 herein, this is the strategy of Mexico's Zapatistas.

Whatever one may think of this imperial characterization of global capital and its concomitant logic of resistance, there is no question that, in addition to the relatively straightforward U.S. domination of the Americas, the more diffuse influence of global financial power has been playing an increasingly important role in the Americas.

In chapter 4 Marichal argues that these two sources of power are not so easily separated and that the hegemony of one state over others has nearly always depended on "great financial strength" on an international scale. Focusing on the financial relations between the United States and Latin America from the end of World War II to the present day, Marichal shows that Washington's establishment of its worldwide military organization has been accompanied by a succession of financial innovations that have contributed to finance its global reach, as well as to submit other nations to financial dependency in a variety of ways. These innovations, he argues, were put in place by the combined efforts of the U.S. government, private corporations, and a group of international financial institutions (IFIs) designed to construct a new international order after World War II. The new order served the interests both of the U.S. government and of global capital. While state and market forces must thus be considered together, market and corporate forces have become considerably more active than the state over the past half century. Looking specifically at Argentina and Mexico, Marichal suggests that the Latin American lending booms of the 1970s constituted a fundamental antecedent to modern financial globalization and led to the inordinate influence of the IFIs during the 1980s and 1990s.

Indeed, as is well known, in the early 1980s most Latin American countries, faced with falling commodity prices, rising international interest rates, and a sizable debt burden, found themselves unable to meet their debt obligations and were therefore compelled to adopt a series of market-based economic reforms as a condition for being "rescued" by the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Beginning in Mexico in 1982, the IFIs imposed a

series of measures that were designed to impart a degree of fiscal and social discipline to Latin American governments and populations in the belief that such discipline would build confidence among the private investors whose self-interested financial activities were meant to drive the recovery and growth of their economies. The most publicly stated idea was that major industrial, commercial, and financial investors could be attracted (or reattracted) to Latin America if and only if they were given reasonable assurance that their investments in the region would be secure and profitable. A second, no less important idea behind these reforms was that recovery and growth would take place only if the region's labor force was severely limited in its ability to press its claims before private employers and the state.⁹

These market-based reforms, which came to be called “neoliberal,” opened national economies to foreign (at the time, mostly U.S.) trade and investment, and included the (attempted) privatization of public activity, the deregulation of private activity, the replacement of institutional with targeted programs of social welfare, the removal of the monetary authority from elected political control, and zero-deficit public budgets that quickly became “austerity budgets” throughout the Americas. The imposition of these reforms—with the assistance and approval of at least some local elites—was made possible by Latin American governments' inability to service their debts. To this day, the foreign debt remains a major vulnerability of most Latin American countries.

Cieza, in chapter 8, narrates the events following Argentina's massive debt default of 2001, which culminated in the country's emergence from its default in such an “independent” way that it became a “bad example” for the IMF. When President Néstor Kirchner assumed office in 2003, the default he inherited allowed him to elaborate a non-neoliberal growth model, consisting of the beginnings of a reindustrialization program and a cautious reinsertion of the state in social programs and economic regulation, without having to negotiate these programs with the IMF. Then, to remove the country from default, he offered to pay foreign creditors 30 cents on every dollar of debt, to be remitted in low-interest federal bonds. Helped by the Venezuelan government's offer to buy up to three billion dollars of these state bonds, Kirchner was in a very strong position to get most of Argentina's private and public creditors to agree to his terms. With its end run around the disciplinary consequences of indebtedness, Kirchner's deal

was not to the IMF's liking, but it, like most of the creditors, had little choice but to accept.

Writing about Brazil, Rubin tells a very different story: unlike Kirchner, a conventional politician who was radicalized by the times, Brazil's president, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, was an unconventional politician who, once in office, adopted orthodox economic policies. "Lula," writes Rubin in chapter 7, "has surprised his own supporters as well as international bankers by rigorously complying with the economic prescriptions of the International Monetary Fund (IMF). The result has been a startling political story: a long-standing leader of the leftist Workers Party (PT) has kept the Brazilian economy stable [and] gained the support of domestic and global financial leaders." He has not, however, left his own poor and working-class followers happy.

Like Cieza, Rubin focuses on the interaction of a "dissenting" state and the popular movements that have attempted to drive it to much greater levels of resistance. Brazil, argues Rubin, is a democracy that has "endured and deepened," in large part due to the activism of social movements and their ongoing ties to the Workers Party. Lula's move away from the platform on which he was elected, however, is a worrying reminder of the power of transnational capital and the limits that financial power places on formal democratic procedures.

Disciplinary Economics

Advocates of a neoliberal "consensus" among the financial institutions have generally preferred to keep their political objectives hidden behind the mantles of "efficient market theory" and "technical assistance," thereby privileging the advice of "value free" economists and technocrats over the discourse of elected politicians and political activists.¹⁰ But the irony—or perhaps the contradiction—of the situation is that neoliberalism, with its insistence on unregulated markets, does not permit the kinds of careful government interventions the developed countries themselves have used to strengthen their domestic industries and deliberately build their own comparative advantages. The Cambridge economist Ha-Joon Chang has commented that the motto of the wealthy countries that advocate on behalf of neoliberal economics should be "Do as we say, but not as we've done."¹¹

There was a time, not so long ago in the developed countries of the West, when the necessity of state intervention in the marketplace, for any num-

ber of reasons, was commonly accepted as a given. In those days, before the neoliberal era, advocates of unregulated markets were marginalized in international-development policy debates. In the past quarter century the tables have turned. Those who have critiqued free markets have been treated as though they simply do not understand the dynamics of human nature and the “real” world. They have also been accused of politicizing what should be a set of value-free, apolitical relationships. Such reconfiguration of “common sense” is another useful mechanism of informal imperial rule.

In order to understand the political logic of neoliberalism, it is therefore necessary to go beyond its discourse and to examine the relevant relations of power. The growing inequality evident throughout the Americas may not simply be a negative unintended consequence of a U.S.-based neoliberal policy consensus, but rather an intended fulfillment of the real objectives of that consensus. After all, economic “discipline” and the maintenance of a large supply of workers able and willing to work hard and cheap can be seen as one of the major motors of the North’s late-twentieth-century economic recovery (which has since stagnated). This great neoliberal success story is considered the legacy of such forceful political leaders as President Reagan, Lady Thatcher, and General Pinochet. As such, the “discipline” of the neoliberal era has replaced the “security” of the Keynesian, post-World War II era as an imperial policy goal.

It is in this context that the exercise of power from both state and transnational sources has had such polarizing consequences in Latin America over the past quarter century. Indeed, one of the defining experiences of the past three decades has been the growth of income inequality both *within* countries and *between* countries. This is the case at all levels. Just as the gap between wealthy and middle-income countries has grown, so has the gap between middle-income and poor countries, and between rich and poor individuals.¹²

In response to inequality *between* countries, there have been increasing efforts to promote regional solidarity in the face of U.S. domination. The revival of the South American Common Market (MERCOSUR) and Hugo Chávez’s various oil-based initiatives within the Americas all spring from a practical kind of regional solidarity: a hope that more trade and investment can be generated within Latin America itself. These moves reflect a desire to negotiate with Washington from a position of greater strength, thus reducing the South’s debilitating dependence on the North.

But such efforts are not necessarily resistance. While the members and associate members of Mercosur seek to build Southern power, many would also like a non-antagonistic relationship with Washington. They promote U.S.-Mercosur negotiations as an alternative to the U.S.-promoted country-by-country negotiations to form a Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA), but most have voiced no opposition to the eventual enactment of a continent-wide free-trade zone that would include the United States. They are simply pursuing the promotion of regional solidarity in the face of U.S. imperial ambitions. A certain degree of pragmatic accommodation, that is, can accompany a measure of dissent.

Even the outspoken anti-imperialists of the group, Venezuela's Chávez and Bolivia's Evo Morales, know that to some extent they must respond to the imperial reality: over 50 percent of Venezuela's crude oil is still sold on the U.S. market, and following the nationalization of Bolivia's gas reserves on May Day 2006, Morales has very carefully been negotiating acceptable terms of sale with the governments of Argentina and Brazil, and terms of participation with the international investors—especially the Brazilian company Petrobras—who have a stake in the industry.

Meanwhile, Chávez has conducted a foreign policy based on regional solidarity, striking oil-based agreements with a group of Caribbean nations (an agreement called PetroCaribe), with Argentina (PetroSur), and with the countries of the Community of Andean Nations (PetroAndina), advancing ambitious proposals for the energy—and eventually economic—integration of Latin America and the Caribbean. Chávez has maintained cordial relations with the leaders of the countries in all those regions, even with his longtime ideological and geopolitical antagonist, President Álvaro Uribe of Colombia, with the aim of constructing a Latin American bloc of nations, supported by the region's ample energy resources. Members of all three pacts have approved an initiative to merge these agreements into a continent-wide initiative called PetroAmérica. This represents a movement toward a greater degree of regional sovereignty and solidarity, as well as gradual independence from the dictates of Washington.

Dissent from Above and Below

In chapter 9 Ellner draws a careful distinction between dissent from above (“the assertion of sovereignty by Third World governments”) and from below (“relatively autonomous social movements and the large number

of people whose daily lives clash with the logic of the established system”) to elaborate on the conflicting models for extensive social change in Venezuela. Powerful elements of both types of dissent can be found throughout Latin America, and Ellner argues that both play a role in the radical movement associated with President Hugo Chávez. Ellner’s chapter thus provides an insightful overview of *Chavismo*, as well as a useful elaboration of—and coda to—one of the central themes of this collection: the distinctions between government- and party-organized dissent and the dissent that emanates from grassroots popular movements.

Key to a close reading of part II is an understanding that of the many contradictions in the Americas, one of the most salient is that between the included and the excluded, between those who can regularly participate in the formal institutions of society, politics, and the economy and those who are able to do so only intermittently or not at all. This divide has become a basis of contemporary politics, partially superseding the traditional, and still-powerful, divide between capital and labor.

In some cases, as with Brazil’s landless rural workers or the Andean and Mesoamerican indigenous peasantry, the exclusion of vast segments of the population dates back to the colonial era. In other cases, as with the working poor in Argentina and Venezuela, exclusion—as a form of class discipline—has been deliberately built into late-twentieth-century economic structures. Whatever its origins, exclusion has been exacerbated to crisis proportions by the region’s current dominant model of social and economic development, a model premised on the systematic exclusion of certain segments of the population from meaningful participation.

In the past few decades the excluded have self-organized into movements striving for inclusion. And to the degree that participants believe inclusion to require significant changes in social, political, and economic institutions, many of these movements have engaged in radical struggles for the creation of a new set of institutions more conducive to these ends. Since the early 1990s, the disruptive, pressuring, and lobbying activities of organized popular movements have directly or indirectly played a role in bringing down governments, electing new governments, and/or influencing government policies—especially privatization policies—in at least a dozen countries in the Americas. The street protests of Argentina’s *piqueteros* (most of them unemployed urban workers), for example, created the conditions for the 2003 election of President Kirchner and the subsequent implementation

of (modestly) alternative policies. The protests were driven by a nationalist sector of the governing Peronist party and were supported by the social movements that emerged from the fragmented and dispersed forms of resistance against the neoliberal model—again, a mix of political-party activism (the Peronists) and “relatively autonomous” social movements.

More often than not, these movements contain a powerful racial or ethnic component. In December 2005 the coca-grower (*cocalero*) leader Evo Morales was elected president of Bolivia in the wake of a long series of disruptive antiprivatization, pro-cocalero street demonstrations. In this instance the mix of “above” and “below” was given an extra twist by the existence, in the Bolivian Andes, of local, regional, and long-distance markets for consumption of coca leaf in its natural state, as well as consumption for ritual and medicinal purposes. These markets, argues Rivera Cusicanqui in chapter 6, provided a solid basis of social organization for the grassroots movement to legalize coca—and hence the livelihood of a large part of the rural, mostly indigenous population—as well as electoral support for Morales.

In addition, Rivera Cusicanqui asserts, the continued existence and growth of these markets has provided an important affirmation of anticolonial indigenous identity. A certain amount of “traditional” coca cultivation has long been permitted in Bolivia by international convention under the assumption that, along with indigenous identity itself, it would soon die out. That this has not happened is an indication that a genuine sense of “indigeneity”—as opposed to what Rivera Cusicanqui describes as the “reified, postcard image of the indigenous culture” embodied by *el indio permitido* (the tolerated Indian)—has survived in Bolivia. This survival, she argues, alongside the popular movement to which it is linked, represents a powerful kind of resistance to the dictates of empire.

Popular mobilization—dissent from below—has not by itself created alternative policies, but over the past fifteen years or so it has served as an impetus for change. And popular movements have developed complex, frequently ambiguous relationships with the governments they have helped bring to power. While some of these movements have strongly identified with newly elected “anti-neoliberal” governments (especially, for example, the neighborhood movements in Venezuela and the cocaleros in Bolivia), many have managed to protect and preserve a significant degree of autonomy for their anti-neoliberal projects. And many movements have divided over the question.

Successful popular movements have often fragmented over whether to join progressive governments. The Uruguayan journalist Raúl Zibechi has written about this phenomenon: “When social justice movements develop the ability to mobilize large numbers of people,” he writes, “and gain influence in the political arena, they create a new scenario that frequently turns against them. Too often, their success weakens and even divides them, thereby leading to a period of withdrawal and demobilization.”¹³ It is an understanding of the value of autonomy and independence that has made many activists uneasy about joining progressive governments that they might be willing to support from the outside, unsullied by the political compromises—some necessary, some opportunistic—that can undermine the motivating belief that “another world is possible.”

Mexico’s Zapatista movement represents perhaps the most deliberate attempt to organize the excluded outside the boundaries of state power. The Zapatista’s “Other Campaign,” which took place alongside the country’s presidential campaign of 2006, was an attempt to reach out to like-minded groups at a time when people were presumably thinking about politics, writes Harvey in chapter 5. It represented their ongoing attempt, says Harvey, “to listen to the problems and struggles of a wide variety of people who are similarly searching for greater levels of coordination and solidarity, while asserting their own particular demands and goals.” The Zapatistas, that is, are among the few revolutionary movements whose goal is not state power, but rather the creation of new forms of social organization outside the state.

Of course, not all active relationships between social movements and the state are alike. There is a crucial distinction, for example, between the Bolivian autonomous popular movement that carried a government to power and the Venezuelan government’s successful mobilization of the population into a series of movements that, as Ellner reports, tend to come and go according to the needs of an essentially state-oriented political movement. With respect to relations between the grassroots and the state, one can identify three broad categories of popular movements: those, like the Zapatistas, that want nothing to do with state power; those, like Bolivia’s cocaleros, that jealously guard their autonomy while supporting and participating in a government they have brought to power; and those, like Venezuela’s electoral battle units (UBES), that are brought into being by popular governments and have no real autonomy of their own.

In all three of these cases, participation and militancy has been for many of the excluded a first step toward participation in the broader political

activities of their respective countries. Further, many of these movements are, to one degree or another, integrated into global movements fighting against a neoliberal world order. Despite their local origins, virtually all of these movements have been drawn into international debates about democratic change, universal social justice, and meaningful political participation.

Social Solidarity vs. the Privatization of Citizenship

Margaret Thatcher, who tried to replace social solidarity with pure individualism, once remarked, “There is no such thing as society, only individual men and women.”¹⁴ This is not a description of life on Earth, but rather the basis for the powerful political program of neoliberalism. This program has succeeded in transforming life for many people around the world, especially those who work under conditions of “flexible” labor, without contracts, without protection, without job security or social security. But the program has not succeeded in doing away with society.

There are now about twelve million undocumented immigrants living in the United States. They are mostly from Latin America and are active members of the U.S. labor force. A great many regularly send money home, paying a kind of informal, voluntary income tax to their homeland. The Bank of Mexico estimates that total remittances from Mexicans working abroad—the vast majority in the United States—amounted to about \$23.5 billion in 2006, the country’s second-largest net source of foreign exchange, after sales of crude oil.¹⁵ Of course, the money goes where the senders want it to go: to their families, their communities, their parishes, their regions of origin.

For many localities in Mexico, remittances amount to a source of income greater than any other, public or private. And in some cases, these private remittances are put to public use, improving local services and repairing local infrastructure. At the same time that many Mexican workers are slipping into informal employment and losing formal-sector health and pension benefits, remittances are strengthening local health clinics, both public and private. The system of flexible labor and benefits is thus mirrored by a system of flexible taxes and obligations. And as with informal wages, there is no guarantee that these informal taxes will be sufficient in years to come or be directed to areas where some form of public debate decides they are most needed. It all amounts to a kind of back-door privat-

ization of public life—the privatization of citizenship itself. In an ongoing Web forum convened by the Social Science Research Council, Craig Calhoun refers to this process as the “privatization of risk,” a process by which “efforts to replace public institutions with market mechanisms shift the burden of life’s many risks disproportionately to those without substantial private wealth.”¹⁶ Should the flow of remittances decline for any reason, there are no public institutions in place to pick up the slack. Thus, while many migrant workers remain tied to their homeland, they also seek rights and inclusion within the countries in which they work. This has become another popular struggle within the U.S. empire.

The existence of civil society itself has strengthened the hand of movements for the rights of migrant workers. In the United States migrant workers were never recruited as members of any community; they were never meant to be workers with connections to a definable set of social relations, with definable rights and responsibilities. They were recruited to work in the United States as members of an informal, atomized labor force, having no relation to society whatever. But civil society has its own dynamic and has come to serve as a kind of alternative public sector.

In the spring of 2006, migrant organizers, supported by many church parishes and ethnic media outlets, managed to bring an astounding number of immigrants—well over a million—onto the streets of major U.S. cities to demand rights, recognition, and legalization. This was certainly a form of “dissent from below” against the fragmentation, flexibilization, and discipline of the greater American workforce.¹⁷

These marches help reveal the underlying contradiction between the informal, flexible conditions under which most undocumented immigrants work and the more stable social, cultural, and political structures in which their lives are embedded. It was these stable structures—church parishes, radio stations, trade unions, hometown associations, community networks, and newspapers—that made the massive turnouts a possibility.

When all relationships are privatized and made flexible, when there are no enforceable social rights and obligations, there is little likelihood that what exists today will exist tomorrow. That may be the principal contradiction of the neoliberal social order. And it is the recognition of that fatal contradiction—as fatal to the undocumented workers as it is to the employers who hire them—that gave the social solidarity embodied by the migrant marches such sudden force and acceptance.

“Society” has also been recreated in the very different political setting in Venezuela, where Hugo Chávez has developed a remarkably strong rapport with poor and marginalized citizens. In his long, weekly, televised chats with the historically excluded he carefully explains current events in ways that include people who have previously been left out of political debates. He urges his viewers to involve themselves in their communities, to pressure his own government to fulfill its promises and achieve its “revolutionary” goals. The talks, frequently folksy and personal, often angry and inflammatory, create an apparent dialogue between the president and the people, and many previously marginalized Venezuelans feel included in citizenship for the first time in their lives.

There is a danger, of course, that this dialogue can become one between a *caudillo* (strongman) and his followers, but for now, Chávez has drawn on and made visible and functional the vast networks of social solidarity among those who had long felt outcast from the networks and privileges of citizenship. In so doing, he has redefined citizenship in Venezuela. The wealthy and middle classes have long excluded the poor majority from any genuine sense of participation in civic life. The poor, who have been the maids, gardeners, and delivery boys, but never the fellow-citizens of the privileged, now feel the country belongs to them. That’s why the opposition by the privileged classes is so fierce. There is no gainsaying this accomplishment. Chávez’s initiatives represent a kind of reconstitution of society and a kind of “dissent from above.”

The multidimensional nature of empires—military, economic, political, cultural—has engendered multidimensional responses from their subjects. This has generally made for a process within the confines of those empires that is continuously unfolding, changing, and delivering surprises throughout the imperial lifespan. Both U.S. dominance in the Americas and the global dominion of capital have reached critical phases in their lifespans. The future of both is unwritten.

Notes

1. In March 2002 the neoconservative columnist Charles Krauthammer told Emily Eakin of the *New York Times*, in what became a widely quoted remark, “People are coming out of the closet on the word ‘empire’” (Emily Eakin, “All Roads Lead to D.C.,” *New York Times*, 31 March 2002.) Many proponents of U.S. empire prefer softer phrases like “benevolent hegemony,” “unipolar power,”

- or even “empire lite.” See, for example, Kagan, “Benevolent Empire”; Ignatieff, *Empire Lite*. For the hard line, see Ferguson, *Empire*.
2. The comments of both Boot and Ignatieff were made to columnist Jeet Heer. See Jeet Heer, “Operation Anglosphere,” *Boston Globe*, 23 March 2003.
 3. For the historical context of this imperial attitude, see Grandin, *Empire’s Workshop*, 15–27; Schoultz, “Latin America and the United States,” 59–63.
 4. Grandin, *Empire’s Workshop*, 1–9.
 5. *Ibid.*, 87.
 6. *Ibid.*, 163.
 7. Fred Rosen, “It’s Not about Water,” *Miami Herald* (Mexico Edition), 21 March 2005. Also see “No le preocupa a EU que la izquierda gane elecciones y gobierna en AL: Rice,” *La Jornada* (Mexico), 10 March 2005.
 8. Hardt and Negri, *Empire*.
 9. See, for example, David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, especially his discussion of the restructuring of the Mexican economy (98–104); also see Hershberg and Rosen, “Turning the Tide?” 9–10.
 10. For a collection of early neoliberal arguments, including Mario Vargas Llosa’s widely reprinted “América Latina y la opción liberal,” see Levine, *El desafío neoliberal*. Also see Williamson, *Latin American Adjustment*. For current thinking of the formulators of the Washington Consensus, see Kuczynski and Williamson, *After the Washington Consensus*.
 11. Ha-Joon Chang, comment at the “First Annual Conference for Development and Change,” Antigua, Guatemala, 25–28 July 2003. Also see Chang, *Kicking Away the Ladder*, 1–9.
 12. Gwynne and Kay, “Latin America Transformed,” 8.
 13. Zibechi, “The New Popular Movements.” Perhaps the classic description of this process is Piven and Cloward, *Poor People’s Movements*.
 14. Cited by David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, 23.
 15. Banco de México, *Informe Annual*, 2006, 40.
 16. See <http://privatizationofrisk.ssrc.org>.
 17. The culture of informality has exacerbated the already wide income-distribution gap and thus has been targeted by many trade-union campaigns, including those in the United States. See Rosen, “From Mexico to New York, Labor Joins the Struggle,” 8–11.