

**Chris Hesketh**, *Spaces of Capital / Spaces of Resistance: Mexico and the Global Political Economy*, Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2017. ISBN: 978-0-8203-5174-2 (cloth); ISBN: 978-0-8203-5284-8 (paper)

*Spaces of Capital / Spaces of Resistance* is an ambitious book that seeks to present a new, interdisciplinary understanding of the relationship between capitalist development and social and political resistance in Mexico. Deeply engaged with Marxist thought, the author Chris Hesketh situates his analysis at the intersection of historical sociology and Marxist geography, or “historical-geographical sociology”, as he calls such work (p.3). Accordingly, the book mobilizes certain concepts that are central to geography, including the production of space and scale (relying principally on Lefebvre), and integrates these into Trotsky’s theory of uneven and combined development and Gramsci’s theories of class struggle and passive revolution. Hesketh organizes the book around distinct spatial scales, first examining the integration of Latin America into the global economy, followed by an analysis of capitalist development in Mexico. The book continues with two subnational case studies, Oaxaca and Chiapas, chosen because of the contemporary emergence of notable anti-capitalist social movements, the *Asamblea Popular de los Pueblos de Oaxaca* (“Popular Assembly of the Peoples of Oaxaca”) and the Zapatista movement. Methodologically, the book presents a novel synthesis of existing academic literature regarding capitalist development in Latin America, and draws on interviews with informants in both Oaxaca and Chiapas.

Somewhat lengthy, Chapter 1 presents the theoretical framework that underpins the rest of the book. While in the introduction Hesketh argues that the focus of his book is Indigenous struggle (p.5), he begins Chapter 1 by asserting that the category of class must remain central to a (critical) analysis of capitalism. He then builds the argument that the continued expansion of capitalism is the central process to the production of space in the world today. Accordingly, he identifies several key elements essential to the continual survival, indeed expansion of, capitalism. These include, “abstract space”, “the spaces of

primitive accumulation”, “the capitalist state”, and “uneven and combined space”. He concludes the chapter by arguing that contemporary spatial organization should be understood as the outcome of class struggle.

Chapter 2 offers an economic history of Latin America, with particular emphasis on the rise of ISI (import substitution industrialization) and the subsequent turn to neoliberalism throughout the region. After a short review of the colonial and early independence period, the chapter moves to the heart of the argument. Hesketh argues that it was in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century that capitalism emerged as the “hegemonic mode of production” (p.47, quoting Glade 1986: 49). Largely rooted in agricultural exports, the Great Depression and the two World Wars disrupted this particular spatial configuration, while opening political and economic space for the rise of a bourgeois class faction linked to domestic manufacturing. Quoting Oxhorn (1995), Hesketh argues that ISI represented a form of “controlled inclusion” and thus corresponded with the rise of nationalism and populism in Latin America. Organized through the state, this particular political form represented a compromise between national industrial capital and a mobilized, yet ultimately subordinated, working class. Hesketh then turns to a discussion of the fatal weaknesses of ISI, including the continued reliance on foreign capital, both through FDI and technology transfers. Although ISI appeared to be centered on national development, it was in fact dependent on international economic processes and structures. While the inherent contradictions of ISI began to emerge in the late 1960s and 1970s, it was the debt crisis that demonstrated the limits of this political-economic project, opening the region to a profound reconfiguration of capitalist relations. As is well known, the “servicing” of Latin America’s still enormous international debt has forced successive rounds of social austerity and privatization, dramatically shifting economic production from one organized through national markets, to one driven by exports.

Chapter 3 follows a similar narrative arc as Chapter 2, with a focus on capitalist transformation in Mexico. As stated in the beginning of the chapter, the author’s objective is “to provide an insight into how specific spatial configurations have been

historically produced in Mexico within the contradictions of worldwide capitalist development” (p.72). Under a ruling “agroexport oligarchy”, significant capitalist expansion marked the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, yet it is 20<sup>th</sup> century, post-revolutionary Mexico that most interests the author. Dispelling any political romanticism with the legacy of the Mexican Revolution, Hesketh argues that this significant political upheaval led to a “passive revolution”, in Gramscian terms. ISI, which represented a state-led, negotiated form of subordinate inclusion of the working class, laid the groundwork for significant inward extension of capitalist relationships through state-led industrialization. This form of capitalist development transformed, in turn, the character of Mexican national space. Hesketh then argues that ISI was doomed to failure; profound economic crisis led the Mexican government to change economic course in the 1980s, embracing neoliberal policy. This, in turn, led to a significant spatial reorganization of the Mexican economy and polity, opening the door for new forms of exploitation and resistance.

Chapters 4 and 5 present subnational “case studies” in which Hesketh portrays the processes of capitalist expansion and resistance in the two southern states of Oaxaca and Chiapas, respectively. The aim of Chapter 4 is threefold. First, Hesketh argues that the historically-contingent preservation of communal lands and traditions in Oaxaca has produced the territorial basis for ongoing “counterspaces of resistance” among the largely Indigenous population (p.105). Introducing the term of “uneven and combined hegemony”, his second aim is to demonstrate how struggles over a national hegemonic project demonstrate significant particularities and dynamics at the local scale. Thirdly, Hesketh discusses the ways in which “the dialectic of passive revolution and resistance to it” (p.104) has played out in Oaxaca, from land struggles to state-sanctioned autonomous government. At the chapter’s conclusion, Hesketh emphasizes that, given that passive revolution and *trasformismo* simply forestall rebellion without addressing the underlying causes of conflict, collective resistance to capitalist space in Oaxaca is ongoing. Indigenous communal democratic traditions form the spatial basis for this resistance in both rural and urban spaces. He concludes the chapter by arguing that Oaxacan social

movements for noncapitalist space must “scale up” and link to broader struggles throughout Mexico rather than remain confined to local battles.

In Chapter 5, Hesketh outlines a theory that he calls the “clash of spatializations” between Indigenous/noncapitalist and capitalist space in Chiapas, while developing further the concept of “uneven and combined hegemony”. He presents four distinct “clashes of spatializations” that he observes from the colonial to the post-revolutionary period. In the colonial era, he argues that Indigenous groups in Chiapas, unlike Oaxaca, lost most of their authority, setting the stage for subsequent inter-elite clashes between old and emerging powers, conflicts that continued in the post-revolutionary period. Political organizing from below and national demands for increased food production from above challenged the place of elites in Chiapas. Subsequent land redistribution—the transformation of 47% of *finca* land into *ejidal* properties—incorporated Chiapaneco peasants into the state ISI project while also creating spaces for the reproduction of capital.

The remainder of the chapter is devoted to analyzing the emergence and persistence of Zapatismo. In response to the emergence of neoliberalism, the Zapatistas enacted an explicitly spatial political project. Through the appropriation of land and the creation of autonomous municipalities, the Zapatistas blocked capitalist accumulation by “reclaiming social space in which the logic of capital does not operate” (p.159). Hesketh then presents a series of subsections that highlight distinct social and spatial characteristics of the Zapatistas and describe the multiscale dimensions of their political project. He then analyzes the ways in which the government seeks to reconstitute state hegemony and undermine Zapatismo. These (counterinsurgent) policies, which include the militarization of the state, increased government aid, the remunicipalization of the region, and the creation of “sustainable rural cities”, are also explicitly spatial. He highlights, furthermore, ongoing projects of capitalist accumulation such as the Plan Puebla Panama, which encompasses plantations, roads, canals, and new port capacities to expand international commerce in Chiapas, as well as an expanding ecotourism sector.

Hesketh concludes the chapter by emphasizing, as he did in the case of Oaxaca, that the Zapatistas' principal task must be to extend the "politics of autonomy onto wider spatial scales" (p.171).

To conclude the book, Hesketh invokes contemporary global capitalist and ecological crisis as cause for critical reflection and the collective construction of "spaces of resistance" such as those in Oaxaca and Chiapas. He recapitulates the main points and arguments of the book, positing class struggle as central to the production of space at multiple scales in Mexico; thus capitalism, while not totalizing, "aims towards totalization" (p.176). He then warns of the danger of "state passive revolutionary tactics" (cooptation, in other words) for contemporary anticapitalist movements. Citing Lefebvre (1976), the central question remains, "whether social struggles are reconstituting society as society or in fact reconstituting the power relations of the state" (p.182). He concludes the chapter with a discussion of utopianism, both neoliberal and anticapitalist, arguing that that his book demonstrates that class struggle is a "battle over the meaning of the future utopia and how that utopia is best constructed" (p.183).

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*Spaces of Capital / Spaces of Resistance* represents an interesting example of interdisciplinary work—Chris Hesketh is identified as working in "international political economy"—but the book also runs the risks that such work contains. With its focus on capitalist development, anticapitalist struggle, and space, this promising new title appears poised to build on important traditions in critical human geography. In our view, however, the book relies on an underdeveloped treatment of key geographical concepts and practices that stems from an insufficient engagement with key debates and contributions in the field of critical human geography. Given that the book ostensibly centers on space, and is published as part of an important contemporary critical geography series, these problems are difficult to ignore.

Chapter 1 sets up two central contradictions in the book that are not resolved as one reads the rest of the volume. In this chapter, Hesketh expresses the desire to investigate “the properties of the totality or the social whole” (p.24) by beginning with an analysis of capitalist development at the global scale, in order to correctly contextualize (we understand) “particular pieces” of the whole (p.24). This vision of the “whole” contradicts other theoretical discussions in the chapter, which present capitalism and anti-capitalist struggle as an unfinished and open-ended process. Drawing on Massey, he writes, for example:

If space is always under construction, the outcome of our interactions and the result of “stories so far”, then it is imperative to recognize both the “actually existing” multiplicity of spaces and the potential for other spaces to be progressively transformed (Massey 2005: 9, 130). After all, while capital may be a powerful actor, there is a broader ensemble cast in the story of societies. (p.41)

In a related manner, Hesketh argues for subsuming all forms of anticapitalist struggle under the banner of class. Even though he argues in favor of “defetishizing fixed categories...” (p.15), he remains steadfast in labeling organized resistance in both Oaxaca and Chiapas as expressions of class struggle, despite the fact that such movements are strongly identified as Indigenous movements with significant gendered dynamics (Stephen 2013). Moreover, his promise to “examine how categories such as race, gender, and sexuality are not preformed identities but coconstitutive of one another” (p.20) goes unfulfilled. Thus, while Hesketh reaches towards the complexities of power and resistance in the contemporary era, his book has difficulty escaping a totalizing, almost deterministic analysis. This fundamental problem reflects the absolute primacy Hesketh offers “capitalism” and “class” as the front lines of power and resistance. Accordingly, the book is inscribed in a “big theory” approach to research rather than drawing on

primary sources and iterative, grounded theorizing that would enable an engagement with the multiple subject positions that constitute power and resistance.

A central manifestation of these contradictions is evident in the truncated way Hesketh engages with feminist contributions to geographic thought. While he cites J.K. Gibson-Graham and Doreen Massey extensively, he does not acknowledge their work as feminist, nor does he include explicitly feminist insights into his discussion of capitalism (and other forms of power) and resistance. In the Introduction, for example, he marks the difference between his own “dialectical” approach and Gibson-Graham’s “focus...on a radical politics of language in constructing the social world to achieve transformation” (p.5). Gibson-Graham’s body of work focuses not only on language, but also on experimentation with alternatives to capitalism through action research, and inquiry into economic subjectivities germane to understanding how and why people engage in social movements and politics (Gibson-Graham 2006). A more rigorous engagement with such research might have helped ground the book’s treatment of class (Gibson-Graham et al. 2000), as well as the “spaces of resistance” under investigation. Another example of the presence-yet-absence of feminist theory and gendered analysis emerges in his discussion of the “spaces of primitive accumulation” (p.33). In explaining the contours of the intensive (social) frontier of primitive accumulation, Hesketh dedicates a (scant) paragraph to the feminist theory of social reproduction which explains how unpaid labor, performed primarily by women, actively reproduces the capitalist labor force. These theoretical insights help to understand that in Oaxaca and Chiapas, one important frontier of primitive accumulation is structured through the active devaluation of the bodies of primarily Indigenous and poor women, who experience not only the burdens of social reproduction but also misogynistic violence, including femicide. It is unfortunate therefore that these women’s distinct experience of oppression and their concomitant struggles to produce and defend public, non-capitalist, anti-patriarchal spaces (Federici 2012) plays no role in the analysis of “spaces of resistance” in Oaxaca and Chiapas. This, despite the fact that the women who were at the center of the APPO (*Asamblea Popular*

*de los Pueblos de Oaxaca*) takeover of public media in Oaxaca in 2006 addressed their gendered, raced position explicitly, stating:

We are women who don't usually have a voice because we are brown, we are short, we are fat, and they think that we don't represent the people, but we do. WE are the face of Oaxaca. (quoted in Stephen 2007)

What is more, Hesketh appears to miss the important fact that the sphere of social reproduction and consumption in Mexico has also been at the forefront of the state's passive-revolutionary efforts in the neoliberal era. One particularly notable example is conditional cash transfers to mothers through the program now known as *Prospera* (formerly *Progresá* and *Oportunidades*). One in four people in Mexico are covered by this program; the rate in localities with high indices of marginalization such as those in Oaxaca and Chiapas is often greater than 80% (SEDESOL 2014; Vicenteño 2017). Conditional cash transfers inscribe subaltern bodies, households, and communities in Mexico within a neoliberal consumption framework that regulates their social reproduction through mandatory schooling, home sanitation inspections, and medical appointments, and community service (Molyneux 2006; Sesia 2001). Given that these state transfers reflect a gendered neoliberal framework of individual assistance and personal responsibility that operate at the spatial scales of the body and household, they call into question the simple identification of the "spaces of resistance" in Oaxaca with struggles to preserve collective property regimes.

The choice of methodology, which is notably limited in primary sources (archival or fieldwork) and any discussion of researcher positionality, also limits the study's ability to speak to the field's standards for novel or critical research. In human geography, fieldwork remains an essential component of knowledge production. While still strongly shaped by masculinist impulses and gendered relationships (Gibb 2018), sharp engagement with the politics of fieldwork has enabled critical geographers to explore the



politics of positionality (Sundberg 2005). Accordingly, geographers deploy tentative and partial models of social and environmental processes, in order to understand the ways in which the “world talks back”, not only to confirm but also to challenge and hopefully improve understandings of the world (Massey 2001). For critical geographers, fieldwork is part of the fully intersubjective process of knowledge production. This is true even of geographers profoundly engaged with Marxist and Gramscian political theory (see, e.g., Hart 2006). Unfortunately, the research presented in *Spaces of Capital / Spaces of Resistance* does not engage with this important component of geographical practice. While the last two chapters (on Oaxaca and Chiapas, respectively) include quotes from a select number of interviews in both locations, we have no means for situating these voices; the quotes Hesketh uses serve simply to confirm his arguments.

Finally, we would argue that, despite the title and some provocative neologisms (“uneven and combined space”; “clash of spatializations”), the book presents a weak and under-contextualized analysis of spatial processes. Hesketh’s central treatment of scale reflects this weakness. He equates “scale” with distinct and discreet levels of analysis, which, in a top-down manner, begin with the global and finish with the local. The choice to interview key informants only at the “local” scale subtly reinforces this socially-constructed scalar hierarchy (Marston et al. 2005). It is, presumably, this hierarchical understanding of scale that leads Hesketh to argue that both the APPO and the Zapatistas should “scale up” their politics of autonomy. However, as Lynn Staeheli cautions in the introduction to a special issue of *Political Geography* on social movements and scale, the “ability to transcend scale ... does not necessarily ensure empowerment of social groups or radical transformation of social relations” (1994: 389). In this sense, Hesketh’s simplified treatment of scale runs counter to the very beginning point of debates about scale in geography, as “socially constructed, fluid, and contingent...” (Moore 2008: 204), and skirts around contentious debates about the meaning of scale as an analytical device, a discursive strategy, or the materialization of power (and resistance) (ibid.).

As a result of these cumulative lacunae, the book reads as an attempt to put events and places into a theory, rather than establishing a dialogue between “theory” and contemporary social, political, and economic processes. While critical inquiry into “spaces of resistance” in southern Mexico strikes us as a valuable endeavor, we were ultimately disappointed in both the theoretical and methodological approaches of this book and perturbed by its lack of engagement with debates that surround the key spatial concepts employed. We have written this review as geographers, yet we are not interested in policing disciplinary boundaries. We recognize that historical sociologists and international political economists would bring other insights and observations to the book’s strengths and weaknesses. We would argue, however, that more rather than less engagement with critical human geography would have strengthened this book’s central arguments and objectives. Establishing and maintaining dialogue in critical research across a range of disciplines is just as important as dialogue among social movement activists from a range of places and positions.

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*June 2018*