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Roots, Rites and Sites of Resistance: The Banality of Good – An Introduction

Leonidas K. Cheliotis

Men – men and women, that is – are prone to contenting themselves with the notion that history has always been on a steady course of progress. It is no coincidence that the Greeks coined the term *anthropos*, deriving from *ano throsko* and literally meaning 'looking upwards', to define humankind. Anthropos is said to be developing towards some preordained noble future, symbolized by the ethereal heights to which he or she gazes from below. This is presumably because, unlike other animals, anthropos has the natural capacity for self-knowledge, rational understanding and moral judgement – the capacity to 'look up' at what is in sight in the surrounding world.[1]

A careful look at the course of history, however, quickly dispels the notion. Historical change, as John Stuart Mill (1843/1891) noted well, is not necessarily tantamount to progress. And progress, such as in matters of economy, technology or health, does not necessarily affect all individuals or social groups in a uniform manner. Indeed, advancement for some may come at the expense of others. Whilst, for example, economic growth in the post-war era has most benefited the wealthiest nations, inequalities within and across states have risen dramatically (see, for example, Bata and Bergesen, 2002). The very persistence of inequality goes to show that humans have not invariably exercised their inherent capacity for pure reason, at least not as a unitary community.

The failure to exploit the capacity for reflection in order to pre-empt or redress injustice has famously been theorized by Hannah Arendt (1963) in her report *Eichmann in Jerusalem*. There she speaks of the 'banality of evil', a normalized form of wrongdoing against others perpetrated in the course of one's daily mien. Arendt conceptualizes normalization in an amoral sense, as a mind-numbing process associated with modern

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civilization and its overly rationalized administrative institutions (see also Bauman, 1989). An alternative, morally charged process of banalizing wrongdoing against others is described by Nancy Scheper-Hughes in her discussion of the ' "small wars and invisible genocides" conducted in the normative, ordinary social spaces of public schools, clinics, emergency rooms, hospital charity wards, nursing homes, city halls, jails, and public morgues' (Scheper-Hughes, 2002: 32). The normalization of wrongdoing, according to Scheper-Hughes, evolves from the discursive sub-humanization of victims and the various emotional and moral preconditions of wrongdoing so formed, from mere indifference towards the 'bystander effect' to fervent righteous hatred. It comes as no surprise that one's own wrongdoing may be framed in some moralistic variation of resistance, the ongoing 'war on terror' being a case in point (see further Kearney, this volume).

However, whilst the condition of a damaged ethical life has received due scholarly attention to date, only rarely is resistance to it conceived as an actual possibility with the potential of real effects on a macro-social scale. This is not just a curious lacuna in the literature. To ignore or miss concrete possibilities or instances of resistance is to reinforce the apparent naturalness and inevitability of structures of injustice. The aim of the present volume is to help address this epistemological neglect, exploring the multiplicity of motives, presuppositions, sites, ways and consequences of acts of resistance. Why, where and how does resistance emerge? In what forms or guises does it manifest itself? When is it effective, and when is it truly progressive?

As elaborated in the chapters that follow, resistance can be recalcitrant or transformative in its aims, discursive or physical in its means, and local or generalized in its loci. If there is a single argument that can be distilled, however, it is that the emergence of progressive resistance entails what might be called 'the banality of good'. This is not to be confused with an argument in favour of what historian Jonathan Steinberg (1990) describes as habitual disobedience in the sense of thoughtless or egoistic conduct. As well as lacking moral grounding, such conduct is unimaginative and purely contingent. The banality of good consists, instead, in the incessant rational critique of so-styled 'common sense' and prevalent ethical claims with the aim to establish or preserve just social arrangements. Said differently, what makes the practice of reflexivity 'good' is its moral end-goal, and what makes it 'banal' is the unrelenting nature of its required occurrence. Yardsticks for reflexive assessment may well be sought from extant anthropological laws, such as there being material and symbolic benefits in subordinating the 'I' to the 'us', or in sacrificing individual interest to general welfare (Bourdieu, 2000/2008). Alternatively, the present may be appreciated in comparison to an imagined future which challenges it; what Jean-Paul Sartre (1958/2003) terms 'revolutionary consciousness'.

In terms of methodology, the book negates a series of demarcations. These are the demarcations between diverse disciplines, between varying theoretical realms within and across diverse disciplines, between discipline-defining and marginal theorists, between knowledge produced in the First World and elsewhere, and between theory and empirical research. Thus, a host of scientific domains that seek to theorize ethicopolitical problems and their resolution join company, from sociology, psychology and psychoanalysis to philosophy, theology and anthropology. Along the way, ideas and concepts are borrowed from realms as divergent as Aristotelian ethics, Marxist critical theory, Ricoeur's hermeneutics and religious traditions that have long existed as universal systems of civic virtue. So-called 'founding fathers' of political and social thought are examined alongside insightful theorists who have either fallen into obscurity of late (for example, Erich Fromm) or have largely escaped the attention of mainstream scholarship (for example, Canetti, Psychopedis). Partly to this end, a break is made with that epistemological orthodoxy which privileges social science produced by the First World about itself and others. Mainly through encounters between particular contributors to this book and given texts of others, a wealth of references are made to knowledge generated by the global periphery – the 'Southern' world, to borrow Raewyn Connell's (2007) felicitous term. The aim stretches beyond promoting an intellectual democracy of sorts or 'empowering' weaker states by giving voice to their critically-minded scholars and students. The substance of marginalized social science (as, indeed, the factual recognition of its relative marginalization) may broaden our understanding of local, national, regional and global arrangements (ibid.: xii). With a view to evading 'scholastic bias' or 'theoreticism' – the fetishization of concepts and their compilation, classification or elaboration (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 161) – focus is also placed on an array of concrete, empirically grounded cases, as they may help replenish our theoretical resources in the manner of a continuous dialectical becoming.

As far as structure is concerned, the book is loosely divided into two parts, one mostly theoretical and the other drawing principally on case-based data. Although self-standing and assessable in their own terms, the two parts neatly complement one another. The first part, comprising Chapters 1–5, debates the transformative operations

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of resistance and the values that should underpin it were a change for the better to be effected. Care is taken not to engage in authoritarianism in the sense of philosophical monism. The criteria offered for evaluating the social world and the directions proposed for altering it are not aimed to pre-determine judgment or mould imagination. After all, and as indicated by the very plurality of views expressed, escaping absolute definitions and strict prescriptions is a characteristic inherent to resistance proper (Brighenti, this volume). The point becomes all the more clear in the second and remaining part of the book. There the applicability and effectiveness of universal or universalizing moral systems are debated with reference to certain methods within given social milieux and situated ethical regimes.

In the opening chapter, entitled Values, Crisis and Resistance: Prospects for Freedom Reconsidered, Spiros Gangas traces the role of values in a range of theoretical accounts of resistance. Breaking with cultural relativism, the author's aim is to rethink coalitions between concrete universal values in the face of grave crises around the globe today (for example, poverty, environmental disasters, religious and ethnic intolerance). As a first step to this end, Herbert Marcuse, Agnes Heller and Kosmas Psychopedis are brought together in such a way as to illuminate the axiological dimensions of Marxist thought. Marcuse, for example, underlines the importance of the values inherent to value-free science, from uninhibited critical scrutiny to systematic engagement with facts, and speaks of the need to make the emerging knowledge available to the people under conditions of transparency and freedom. Heller shifts the focus to the individual. No doubt, she argues, social relations should assume an all-inclusive, universal orientation, but they should always facilitate the development and enrichment of one's own personality as well. Psychopedis, for his part, reminds us of the contingent nature of relations of domination, proposing that values become formed or activated at the very moment of crisis. The discussion then turns to Amartya Sen's libertarian approach to social justice, especially his integration of ethics into economics. Sen's is a call for upholding the institutional dimension of collective freedom without stifling individual agency. Value-hierarchies should not lead to closure, he explains, whilst agents should be given choice as to the objects of valuation.

In Narcissism, Humanism and the Revolutionary Character in Erich Fromm's Work, Leonidas K. Cheliotis gives the discussion a psychoanalytical spin. Insofar as the ultimate task of political theory is to promote progressive grassroots changes at the societal level, the author argues, it has first to clarify the need for change of the sort (for example, to reveal structural injustices) and explicate the reasons lying behind the state of affairs at issue. The dynamics of resistance cannot be actualized unless we first define the powers resistance must overcome (Butler, 1997). To this end, political theory ought to address the social processes by which common sense and prevalent ethical principles are produced and reproduced. How is it that people consent to their own subordination? And how is it that they permit or even actively participate in practices of domination over others? The analytic tools and operations favoured by Cheliotis are neither those of rational choice theory, nor of prominent scholarship on custom and habituation, for example, Pierre Bourdieu's praxeology. He rather turns for assistance to psychoanalysis and Erich Fromm. Frommian psychoanalysis traces the roots of cognitive structures in the universal narcissistic need for corporeal and existential security. It is this need that renders people prone to admire authority and submit to it, on the one hand, and to want to dominate over others, on the other hand – a two-pronged situation which Fromm terms the 'authoritarian character'. Fromm's is not a call for narrowing down our focus to the individual, or for adopting psychologism and its determinist assumptions. His intention is to put the whole of society 'on the couch' without missing or undermining the influences exerted upon the collective unconscious 'from the outside'. In the last analysis, narcissism is a catch-all semiotic metaphor Fromm employs in order to wed the innermost recesses of the ordinary self with the various layers of the outer socio-political world. But this is not all. In addition to deconstructing the narcissism of 'normal' individuals, Fromm also aspires to reconstruct it. Narcissistic cathexes, he contends, carry an inherent potential for societally progressive conduct. What is needed – and here is a further task required of critical theory – is to redirect individual narcissism towards humanism on a collective scale. For only humanism can bind individuals in harmony and love without stultifying individuality and difference.

The following two chapters throw light on the nature, scope and possibility of political theology as a means of resistance against violence. In Thinking after Terror: An Interreligious Challenge, Richard Kearney combines different religious traditions by way of responding to the phantasmagoria of terror that spread around the world in the aftermath of 9/11. Kearney distances himself from the prevalent Western view that the so-called 'War on Terror' and wars more broadly are to be understood and resolved solely by way of politics, economics and sociology. Insofar as a certain misappropriation of religion lies at the heart of aggression and violence, he argues instead, then the solution may well consist in a re-appropriation of the vision of non-violence as it is found in a range of religious 'wisdom traditions'. The solution, in other words, may entail a shift from the language of religious exclusivism, triumphalism and absolutism to that of spiritual dialogue and tolerance. Following Paul Ricoeur, Kearney concludes by outlining the steps of a 'hermeneutic of tolerance'.

In Ecce Homo: The Political Theology of Good and Evil, John O'Neill addresses Hannah Arendt's solecism on the banality of evil and the possibility of moral resistance in terms of the identity question posed in the biblical trial of Jesus. O'Neill argues that, instead of judging Eichmann as a moral 'idiot' blindly loyal to a genocidal regime, if not as an exemplary figure of modernity and its sociological 'thoughtlessness', Arendt might have posed the identity question as put to Jesus by Pontius Pilate: Who of us has the power to forgive? To put it differently, Arendt's turn to the Kantian formulation of the Categorical Imperative to capture Eichmann's stalled ethical will abstracts from the biblical narrative of 'answerability' and forgiveness. The matter, O'Neill concludes, is one of resisting ourselves as the source of reified alterity (hardness of heart, hearing, seeing) that projects itself in an 'alienology of evil'.

The programmatic logic behind all previous chapters is teased out in Andrea Mubi Brighenti's contribution, entitled Resistance as Transformation. Moving beyond the mainstream conceptualization of resistance as opposition to power, the former resembling a form of inertia and the latter an active force, Brighenti approaches resistance as a transformative endeavour. 'Resistance means transforming what is into what could be', he writes. Following Elias Canetti, the author elaborates that the political field, strictly speaking, is only one amongst numerous social locations where resistance may be practiced. But – and here Brighenti parts company with the preceding contributors – the tools of resistance are not to be found in symbolism and discourse in particular. Insofar as power imposes itself on the body, resistance in the sense of escaping the physical shackles of power and making new beginnings is first and foremost a bodily act. It is with this in mind that Brighenti also concerns himself with the tactical role played by (in)visibility in the actualization and effectiveness of resistance.

Although privileging the body as a tool of resistance, Brighenti's tactical concerns provide a bridge between the two parts of the book. To the degree that narratives may serve as means by which to make claims of justice visible and create bonds of solidarity, the *art of telling narratives* acquires primary importance (see further Solinger *et al.*, 2008). With the advent of electronic mass media, however, narrative visibility takes on what Thompson (2005) terms a 'de-spatialized' dimension. The field of vision is no longer constrained by the spatial and temporal properties of the here and now, but is rather shaped by the distinctive properties of communication media. This is why narratives and aesthetic representation more broadly carry the potential to engender a generalized sense of responsibility, for all possible cases of human suffering and injustice, beyond the micro-spaces where direct interpersonal encounters develop and particular demands for help and justice come to the fore.

Taking up this theme in Acting on Vulnerable Others: Ethical Agency in Media Discourse, Lilie Chouliaraki focuses on television spectacles of distant human suffering as means by which to mobilize critical judgement and imagination in the service of cosmopolitanism. From a rescue mission for illegal African refugees, to a famine crisis in the poor Argentinean province of Tucuman, to the 'death by stoning' sharia verdict against a Nigerian woman who gave birth to a child outside marriage, all broadcasts examined raise the issue of how to act on given instances of suffering, but each employs different aesthetic registers and proposes divergent patterns of action and ethos of viewing. Aesthetic quality, for example, spans cinematic entertainment, philanthropy and political activism; correspondingly, viewing positions span voyeurism, philanthropy and protest. Eschewing postmodernist pessimism, Chouliaraki concludes by calling for a version of mediation as moral education.

In the following chapter, Sites of Resistance: Death Row Homepages and the Politics of Compassion, Ezra Tessler also deals with the potential of the mass media to function as a tool of resistance to human suffering, only his focus is on the uses of a comparatively newer medium – the Internet – by sufferers themselves. Tessler discusses the current spread of death row homepages as an example whereby marginalized actors struggle to transgress physical borders and build communities of resistance with the general public. Prisoners employ complex, and often contradictory, narrative identities, modes of address and techniques of representation to oppose dominant attitudes towards crime and capital punishment. A critical sociology of suffering, the author concludes, should aspire to bring to the fore the progressive political value of oppositional voices, whether captive or otherwise.

To be sure, the possibilities for moral conduct are not exhausted with the prevention of further physical pain onto visible sufferers, be they proximal or distant in a geographical sense. We should raise our aspirations even higher and shift the focus of our attention from practical expressions of empathy, after an act in need of empathic response has occurred, to the prevention of such acts from occurring in the first

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instance – from secondary to primary prevention, so to speak (Cheliotis, 2010 forthcoming). The realization of either or both mandates, however, remains contingent upon powers of a far higher order. Not unlike the *mise en scène*, the content of mediation – which sufferings receive coverage and which messages are relayed more generally – usually entails choices and decisions by those who own or control the means of cultural production (Vetlesen, 1997: 18; see also Chouliaraki, 2006).

Are we, then, trapped in vicious circles of domination? How is it possible, for example, to democratize the conditions of access to the means of mass mediation? Insofar as official solutions prove insufficient or even contradict their stated aims, are there any alternative ways in which subordinates themselves may fight social injustice? If there are, at what personal or in-group cost, and with what degree of success? To the extent that the production and reproduction of domination presuppose collaboration on the part of street-level bureaucrats and other seneschals, when, if ever, and under what conditions do they engage in resistance? The last four chapters debate these issues by explicit or implicit reference to the logic and practices of 'modernization'. Originating from the prosperous enclaves of the West (whence its overlap with the concept of 'Westernization'), modernization is an official teleology of national and global advancement based on the intense rationalization of processes on a range of levels: from the economic and the legal to the political and the social. Thus, for instance, the poverty gap between East and West is supposed to close if the former follows the neoliberal path trodden by the latter. Similarly, managerialism is hailed as the antidote to corrupt and failing bureaucracies (for critical discussions see, Power, 1997; Rose, 1999; Ong, 2006; Wacquant, 2009).

In Face to Face with Abidoral Queiroz: Death Squads and Democracy in Northeast Brazil, Nancy Scheper-Hughes offers three crucial reminders. First, the language of resistance and its cousin terms (for example, revolution) may well be employed by the ruling class to disguise social arrangements of domination. Second, resistance proper has no foregone conclusions: just as it may fulfil its progressive aims, so too it can get trapped in cycles of reformism or simply prove utterly futile. And third, practical engagement in resistance is at times perilous, deadly even. Scheper-Hughes begins by drawing attention to the military dictatorship which ruled Brazil between 1964 and 1985, as it related to the so-called 'modernization' of national economy. Both developments were euphemistically described as 'revolutions', the latter also as a 'miracle', a kind of discourse which served to obscure the role of 'pernicious class relations', 'the macroparasitism of uncontained "market forces" that has fed and preyed on the bodies of the young, the vulnerable, and the powerless' (Scheper-Hughes, 1992: 280). With the consent of the winners of economic modernization, that is, a war was waged against loose children, rural migrants and unemployed black and brown men, all of whom were classified as pathologically dangerous by dint of their poverty and associated problems. Scheper-Hughes focuses on the dual role played by paramilitary 'death squads' during the years of the coup: to 'sweep the streets of social garbage' and suppress political dissidence. As the 'economic revolution' began to falter in the 1980s, a demand for a shift to democratic structures emerged. The military dictatorship gradually came to an end, activist groups launched conscious-raising campaigns about a host of social issues and child abuse in particular, whilst a new constitution was put in place to extend civil rights to the whole population. As is so often the case, however, neither active conscious-raising nor, indeed, 'modernization' of the law translated into practice. Public opinion polls revealed strong support for social cleansing and death squad attacks resurfaced with greater vigour. Resistance could not but acquire a local character against such a background. The protagonists in Scheper-Hughes's account are two local judges who coalesced with a small band of human rights activists, a few citizens who participated in a nationally broadcast march *contra morte*, Scheper-Hughes herself – the anthropologist-*companheira* who joined the struggle – and a musician-turned-truth-teller and 'voice of the poor' through his community radio talk show. Notwithstanding the inroads made, Scheper-Hughes avoids weaving a romantic narrative. In the manner of what Fromm terms the 'utopianism of the "awake"' (on which see Cheliotis, this volume), she demonstrates that 'happy endings are premature'.

Resisting Submission? The Obstinacy of 'Balkanist' Characteristics in Greece as Dissidence against 'the West', by Sappho Xenakis, is another case where the rewards of resistance are by no means clear or certain. The author provides an account of normative hybridity that addresses rival notions of the 'good'. Drawing inspiration from Homi Bhabha's post-colonialist framework, she describes the dialectics of transgression of 'Balkanist' and 'Western' norms within the context of contemporary Greece. Rather than accepting the common denotation of 'Balkanism' as a mere recalcitrant 'bad' and 'Westernization' as an *a priori* 'good', Xenakis invites us to consider the progressive and regressive potentials of each. She argues further that Greeks, from the general public to the elites, tend to shift from one rationale to another according to particular demands of the moment. The reflexivity presupposed in the process belies widespread concerns that normative hybridity inevitably handicaps the promise of progressive politics.

The last two chapters take the discussion to the world of criminal justice professionals. In Legitimation and Resistance: Police Reform in the (Un)Making, Justice Tankebe analyses instances of conflict and resistance within police organizations. The police, Tankebe argues, need to legitimate their authority in the eyes of the public as much as they need to legitimate authority to themselves. Organizational resistance, however, is bound to impinge on self-legitimation efforts, particularly during times of reform. Taking the example of anti-corruption reforms in the Ghanaian police, the author explores the reasons why, and the ways in which, police officers may resist, also linking resistance to legitimation enterprises. Tankebe demonstrates that the reason for police resistance to reform is more the inconsistent and discriminatory enforcement of anti-corruption measures than the substance of measures or the threats they may carry for individual interests.

Alison Liebling's contribution, 'Governmentality' and Governing Corrections: Do Senior Managers Resist?, tells a rather different story. Drawing on direct observation and interviews with senior managers at the Prison Service in England and Wales, Liebling demonstrates that, albeit still feasible, professional resistance to the ever-increasing managerialization of criminal justice is becoming all the more rare. This is partly because of a wide range of rigid organizational constraints now in place to promote compliance (for example, incessant performance testing and relentless competition) and partly because professionals tend to believe actively in the value of such constraints as tools to enforce the 're-moralization' of the prison. Managerialism, Liebling warns, is not inherently immoral, yet preoccupation with operational procedures and the management of personnel tends to overshadow ethical reflection and action on the policy-setting level. Rather than ending on a note of despair, the author suggests that raising questions about the culture and direction of criminal justice work is one way in which empirical research may help effectuate progressive change on the ground.

Much more could be said about the contributions to this collection. Before letting them speak for themselves, however, some additional notes by way of acknowledgement are due. Over half of the forthcoming chapters were presented in a preliminary form at an event organized by the editor under the title 'The Banality of Good: Roots, Rites and Sites of Resistance: An International Interdisciplinary Symposium'. The event took place on 18 April 2007 at the Institute of Criminology, University of Cambridge, with the kind permission of its

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Director, Friedrich Lösel, who also delivered a warm address of welcome. Eamonn Carrabine, of the University of Essex, delivered a highly stimulating opening talk on the sociology of punishment. Panels were chaired by Carol Bohmer, Tony Bottoms and Loraine Gelsthorpe, all of whom deserve appreciation for their time and effort. Special mention needs to be made of Loraine Gelsthorpe, who generously organized a reception in the beautiful premises of Pembroke College. Whilst the book project was still at its infancy, valuable advice was given to the editor by Tina P. Gioka-Katsarou, Yvonne Jewkes and Iain Wilkinson. The project also benefited from various discussions with Sappho Xenakis. Eleni Chelioti helped diligently, and at very short notice, with the first copyedit of the manuscript. Finally, and not unlike the authors of individual chapters, Philippa Grand and Olivia Middleton at Palgrave Macmillan deserve many thanks for their patience and encouragement throughout the (lengthier than anticipated) process of preparing the manuscript for submission.

This volume is dedicated to the loving memory of Tina P. Gioka-Katsarou.

Note

1. The etymological origin of the term anthropos has been debated of late, yet the point remains. Whether anthropos actually derives from ano throsko or, as critics argue, ano throsko is the origin of anthropos according to folk etymology alone, humans have long taken comfort from the underlying belief that they are uniquely predisposed towards higher things.