

THE ACADEMIC USES OF *LO INDÍGENA*

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- Indians and Leftists in the Making of Ecuador's Modern Indigenous Movements.** By Marc Becker. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008. Pp. xxv + 303. \$22.95 paper.
- Social Movements, Indigenous Politics and Democratisation in Guatemala, 1985–1996.** By Roddy Brett. Leiden: Brill, 2008. Pp. vii + 223. \$86.00 cloth.
- A Revolution for Our Rights: Indigenous Struggles for Land and Justice in Bolivia, 1880–1952.** By Laura Gotkowitz. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007. Pp. xi + 398. \$23.95 paper.
- Countering Development: Indigenous Modernity and the Moral Imagination.** By David Gow. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008. Pp. x + 300. \$23.95 paper.
- The Moral Force of Indigenous Politics: Critical Liberalism and the Zapatistas.** By Courtney Jung. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008. Pp. xiii + 350. \$22.99 paper.
- Rights in Rebellion: Indigenous Struggle and Human Rights.** By Shannon Speed. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008. Pp. xi + 244. \$21.95 paper.
- Radical Democracy in the Andes.** By Donna Lee Van Cott. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008. Pp. xv + 261. \$24.99 paper.

For decades, outside scholars viewed Latin America's indigenous peoples as relatively passive victims of conquest and development or as subsumed in the class category of campesino. Now, the indigenous have forced themselves to the forefront of our attention through such spectacular acts as the indigenous uprisings in Ecuador in the 1990s, the Zapatista insurgency in Chiapas, Mexico, beginning in 1994, and the rise to power of Evo Morales in Bolivia. The books reviewed here are a good sample of recent monographs in this area by anthropologists, historians, and political scientists.¹

1. Another recent monograph is Tanalís Padilla, *Rural Resistance in the Land of Zapata: The Jaramillista Movement and the Myth of the Paz Priísta, 1940–1962* (Durham, NC: Duke Univer-

These works build on what has become an enormous literature by both Latin American and outside scholars, by both political activists and academics, including both case studies and broad comparisons.² The rise of indigenous movements received particular attention in countries with large indigenous populations—Ecuador, Peru, and Bolivia—and of course in Chiapas after the emergence of the Zapatistas. Perhaps the best overviews are by the anthropologist Kay Warren and the political scientist Deborah Yashar.³

The emergence of indigenous social and political movements, and the resulting surge of academic interest in *lo indígena*, were accompanied by changes in the disciplines of the social sciences. Since the origins of sociology in the nineteenth century, the social sciences in general have been marked by the positivist ideal of scientific objectivity and the goal of a science of society as fully universal and verifiable as any of the natural sciences. From the beginning, voices dissenting from the mainstream agenda affirmed a more interpretive approach deeply rooted in particular times and places. In the past few decades, those dissenting voices have become stronger, and all of the works here reviewed exemplify, in greater or lesser degree, this antipositivist turn.

The several disciplines at issue were in very different places when they entered the antipositivist turn, and this has shaped the very distinct features of antipositivism in anthropology, history, and political science. Anthropology has always focused principally on small communities, typically on the periphery of large-scale national societies, often ethnically distinct from the national society, and often comprising indigenous

sity Press, 2008). This book is highly relevant, but it defines resistance to Mexico's Partido Revolucionario Institucional hegemony largely in terms of campesino rather than indigenous rebellion. Excluded from my review essay are works in literary and cultural criticism, such as Brian Gollnick's *Reinventing the Lacandón: Subaltern Representations in the Rain Forest of Chiapas* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2008), and edited volumes, which may provide excellent overviews of a field but typically lack the clearly defined argument of monographs. Three recent examples are Pamela Wilson and Michelle Stewart, eds., *Global Indigenous Media: Cultures, Poetics, and Politics* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008); Henry Minde, ed., *Indigenous Peoples: Self-Determination, Knowledge, Indigeneity* (Delft: Eburon Academic Publishers, 2008); and Salvador Martí i Puig, ed., *Pueblos indígenas y política en América Latina: El reconocimiento de sus derechos y el impacto de sus demandas a inicios del siglo XXI* (Barcelona: Fundació CIDOB, 2007).

2. Outstanding Latin American scholars include Xavier Albó on Bolivia, Carlos Iván Degregori on Peru, León Zamosc on Ecuador, Demetrio Cojti-Cujil on Guatemala, and Xóchitl Leyva-Solano on Mexico. Outstanding comparativists in both English and Spanish include Xavier Albó, Deborah Yashar, León Zamosc, Kay Warren, Nancy Grey Postero, and Donna Lee Van Cott.

3. Kay Warren, *Indigenous Movements and Their Critics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998); Deborah Yashar, *Contesting Citizenship in Latin America: The Rise of Indigenous Movements and the Postliberal Challenge* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

inhabitants of lands that colonizers from elsewhere now occupy. The goal of classical ethnographic research was to learn about human society in general by studying these small-scale, culturally distinct societies. The method was holistic: the anthropologist would live in and participate in the life of the community for an extended period (often years), becoming part of it, while maintaining the ability to stand outside it and analyze it. Ultimately, the researcher would leave the community and publish reports that other anthropologists read, contributing thereby to the accumulation of knowledge about human societies in general and informing those who might wish to interact with the particular society that was studied.

By the 1970s, some anthropologists were severely criticizing this traditional approach of the discipline, arguing that ethnography effectively exploited the communities being studied, which were no more than raw material for the production of academic knowledge. Moreover, it was charged that traditional anthropology was complicit in the destruction of the societies it studied by disseminating knowledge about them without any commitment to helping them deal with the consequences. Instead, anthropologists ought to be fully committed to furthering the goals of those they study; they should, in short, be engaged, not objective.

Shannon Speed and David Gow, the two anthropologists in our set, certainly qualify as engaged, but each in ways that the other might regard as suspect. Gow studied Nasa indigenous communities in Cauca, Colombia, in the wake of a 1994 earthquake that led the government to relocate those communities to diverse locations around the department. Gow's concern is how indigenous communities deal with pressures of development and modernity, and what use they choose to make of elements of their cultural heritage. The specific institutional context of his study is how three relocated communities dealt with state-mandated community planning. His major thesis is that each community, in different ways, transmuted officially sanctioned development into varieties of what he calls "counter-development," transcending the conventional concern for poverty reduction and "promoting a process that would produce culturally different citizens—protagonists in a multicultural nation" (2).

Gow is critical of those anthropologists and others who believe that "development . . . is imposed and does not work" for poorer and more marginal sectors (4). He points out that poor and marginal people may be skeptical of international institutions, state agencies, or nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) that purvey development, but they may view development—and modernity—in other ways, as he proposes to show. In particular, the people in question may have a different vision of "good" society than that which development professionals envision.

Anthropological researchers, Gow points out, are often regarded with suspicion as "avaricious extractors of information who will fully exploit what they have gathered for their own benefit, offering little or nothing in

return" (6). Successful research thus requires reciprocity or collaboration in some mutually acceptable form. But such collaboration carries its own issues: "Do we collaborate only with those whom we like and admire professionally and personally? What about those of whom we strongly disapprove but who may be important and active participants in the processes being studied, such as certain politicians, bureaucrats, businesspeople, soldiers, police officers, guerrillas, paramilitaries, and common criminals? What are the implications of 'taking sides,' consciously or unconsciously, for the types of research we choose to undertake and the substance of the books and articles we publish?" (7).

The three relocated communities that Gow studied were quite distinctive in the ways they engaged the opportunities of development and the problem of maintaining their indigenous identities. In Tóez Caloto, one of the elders took the lead in building a school that would teach the Nasa language along with the regular curriculum, but for the most part, parents refused to support this initiative by speaking the language at home. This elder and some of the other more entrepreneurial families took advantage of the opportunities that resettlement offered, but others did not. In a second community, Cxayu'ce, the families of three elders prospered economically while maintaining a strong indigenous identity. The third community, Juan Tama, had the least economic success but is "the most dynamically Nasa of the three resettled communities" (8). Dow also studies the predominantly Nasa municipality of Toribío, much closer to the metropolitan center of Cali and much more firmly established than the three previously discussed. Toribío won a national prize for the best development plan but had been engaged in planning since a local parish priest organized the first planning workshop in the region in 1980.

All the communities wanted development but on their own terms. They wanted education, but they wanted to control its form and substance. Although details varied among them, all used the mandated planning process to serve their own agendas rather than simply accepting nationally imposed ideas of development. All also experienced the impact of a variety of outside "experts" who both facilitated and manipulated the planning process. We will see that the role of outsiders is a critical issue for most of the indigenous movements discussed in this review.

In short, Gow views these indigenous communities in Colombia, having engaged the opportunities for development that the world around them presented, as "engaging in a creative form of resistance, a form of counterdevelopment, more explicitly critical of modernity, which can contribute to a radical politics of inclusive citizenship" (242). In an environment where open defiance is a recipe for death, this may be a wise strategy for indigenous people.

Speed shows us engaged anthropology of a much different sort, in a much different environment. Her focus is on Chiapas in the epoch of the

Zapatista uprising, which began in 1994. As one would expect of anthropological field research, Speed spent considerable time in Chiapas between 1995 and 2004, both in the principal towns and cities, and in the remote interior where the Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (EZLN) held sway. Yet rather than assume the exclusive role of ethnographer engaged in participant observation of a community, she also took a position as director of the San Cristóbal office of Global Exchange, an NGO based in the United States and openly sympathetic to the EZLN, which sent groups of observers into Chiapas. This approach would not have been congenial to a more traditional, ethnographic anthropologist, but it entirely fit with Speed's conception of activist research, which she defends at length in her preface, with further applications of the concept made explicit throughout the text.

Speed views herself as contributing to a long process of reevaluation within anthropology, entailing fundamental criticisms of the discipline's traditional *modus operandi*. Anthropology (and the social sciences in general) were viewed as colluding with colonialism and related structures of domination. The ideal of scientific objectivity was increasingly considered fraudulent, and thus the researcher came to be seen as obliged to be explicit about her or his political values and commitments as they might affect research subjects. Indeed, for this current of thinking, researchers had a particular obligation to be committed to the liberation of the subjects of their research and to the decolonization of the discipline. "Influenced by these currents," says Speed, "I came to the research project in Chiapas with dual aspirations that went beyond an academic interest in understanding the dynamics of neoliberal globalization, the discourse of human rights, and indigenous resistance in Chiapas. I was also interested in participating in that struggle and allowing my own insights to emerge from engagement. Finally, I sought, at a minimum, to engage in an anthropological research practice that addressed the politics of knowledge production" (4–5).

Like Gow, Speed determined that access to her subjects in the highly polarized environment of Chiapas required that she identify herself with their cause: detached objectivity was not an option. At the same time, such a commitment also closed doors to her on the side of the government and among local opponents of the Zapatistas. The consequences of this show up throughout the book, as those on the "other side" are portrayed with little depth or nuance, and always from a perspective sympathetic to the Zapatistas.

It is refreshing to see a scholar so systematically reflective about her own motivations and values as they shaped the research project, and certainly this book provides important insights into contemporary Chiapas, particularly into those sectors most closely associated with the Zapatistas. But the picture presented is a partial view, not only in the sense that it is

openly committed to the Zapatista cause but also in the sense that part of the picture is left out, either because Speed does not know it or because she does and chooses not to tell us. For example, she tells us nothing of great interest about those peasants who are opposed to the Zapatistas: what are their motivations and values? Do they differ significantly in social characteristics from Zapatista supporters? She cannot tell us these things because she forfeited access to those people. Perhaps, as she argues, this forfeiture was necessary to have access to her primary subjects. More troublesome, Speed certainly knows a great deal about the internal life of Zapatista communities and of the Zapatista movement, including the outside origins of its public face, Subcomandante Marcos. It would be interesting to learn more about how Marcos and his collaborators achieved success in Chiapas and fascinating to learn how the EZLN actually functions as an organization. Speed probably knows a good deal about these questions but believes that informing her readers might undermine the cause to which she is committed. The result, unfortunately, is a portrait of the Zapatistas that is flat and unconvincing.

Both history and political science have been subject to dissent and revision similar to those in anthropology, but neither discipline has faced quite the sort of systematic insurgency exemplified by Speed, who comes at the Zapatista phenomenon from the broadly Marxist or post-Marxist perspective of Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's *Empire*.⁴ This perspective has had minuscule support among political scientists. Instead, Courtney Jung frames her analysis of the Zapatistas with what she calls critical liberalism. Speed would no doubt argue that the very idea of critical liberalism is an oxymoron. Jung is concerned with the emergence of indigeneity as partially supplanting class as the organizing principle for political struggle in Mexico. She views critical liberalism as emerging from six observations on the politics of cultural claims as historically constituted and contingent:

1. Both peasants and indigenous are more fruitfully conceived as political rather than personal identities. Both are responses to the Mexican state-building project, and there is no evidence that one is inherently deeper than the other.
2. The origins of the indigenous rights movement, in Mexico and elsewhere in Latin America, are to be found in peasant politics and not in cultural differences.
3. Both peasant and indigenous identities are constructed. Neither is primordial or essential.

4. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001).

4. The modern state has played the most direct role in constituting such political identities by using differences of wealth, skin color, culture, and language to organize and control the boundaries of political membership.
5. Although social group membership to some extent constitutes individuals, individuals also play an important role in forging the groups in which they assert membership.
6. It is a mistake to consider indigenous politics and the scope of indigenous rights through the lens of culture alone. Race and class are always relevant, along with language and culture, as mechanisms of exclusion. (18–21)

In Jung's view, critical liberalism is that current of liberal political thought that seeks to revise and enrich democratic theory by justifying special rights for permanent minorities—particularly ethnic, racial, and religious minorities—to allow their survival in a democratic context in which they will always be a minority. Jung is arguing for a particular approach to critical liberalism that entails a constructivist (rather than essentialist) theory of identity formation and a view of group rights and state obligations rooted in particular historical conditions. The legitimacy of particular claims ought to be established “through the language of structural injustice rather than cultural difference, contestation over consensus as a source of liberal democratic authority, and the category of membership rights as a strategic alternative to collective and individual rights” (21). Thus, she argues: “The emergence of the Mexican indigenous rights movement is best understood by situating the Zapatista uprising in the context of two shifting political landscapes. At the junction of the global and the local, indigenous politics emerged from the limits of peasant politics, under the weight of 500 years of exclusion and discrimination. It is this history that illuminates the moral force of indigenous peoples” (3).

This case study of the emergence of the Mexican indigenous rights movement intends to elucidate how liberal democracies ought to deal with the demands of ethnic minorities. This case is significant, Jung argues, because it challenges the views of Canadian and American theorists concerning ethnic identity as arising from cultural difference, and it supports a constructivist interpretation. Chapters 2–5 focus on the Mexican case, tracing the twentieth-century move from a politics of class to a politics of indigeneity and showing changes over time in how people have constructed their identities. Oddly, the last chapter, which ought to be a grand summing-up, is in fact a broad literature review, useful, no doubt, but better placed after the introduction.

Jung views the EZLN as initially rooted in the Marxist, class-oriented tradition, deeply influenced by Ché Guevara and Central American rev-

olutionaries of the 1980s. But the EZLN was also decisively influenced by the international indigenous movement, which emerged in the same years, so that, over time, the Zapatistas became increasingly identified with the demand for indigenous rights. The Zapatistas accordingly built themselves into a dominant presence on the Mexican left by emphasizing their indigenous identity, adding other elements to their discourse such as democracy and feminism. Chapter 5 looks in detail at contemporary indigenous politics and at the EZLN in particular, including its approach to the major issues of democracy, self-determination and citizenship, globalization, the environment, and feminism, all of which tend to broaden the scope of indigenous politics. The Zapatistas, she argues, “were instrumental in linking an indigenous rights agenda to the worldwide anti-globalization movement” (231).

Jung’s portrait of the Zapatistas is less detailed than that of Speed, because Jung’s focus is much broader, taking in all sides of Chiapas and national politics, as well as the international economic and political environment. But the book loses impact because the argument is not well wrapped up. The last chapter, as noted earlier, simply does not do the job.

Roddy Brett, also a political scientist, focuses across the border in Guatemala, whose Maya majority is related to the indigenous population of Chiapas. He examines the emergence of indigenous politics in the period between the initial establishment of constitutional rule in 1985 and the signing of the peace settlement between the government and the Unión Revolucionaria Nacional Guatemalteca (URNG) in 1996. As does Jung, he uses his study to explore the usefulness of current theoretical approaches in political science. Focusing in particular on theories of collective action, he explores three approaches—resource mobilization, identity, and political process—as ways of explaining patterns of indigenous activism. He also uses three organizations as cases: El Consejo de Comunidades Étnicas–Runujel Junam (CERJ), La Coordinadora Nacional Indígena y Campesina (CONIC), and La Defensoría Maya (DM).

The CERJ, an early *mayanista* organization, emphasized indigenous identity within the frame of universal human rights, and amid extreme violence, in the early stages of Guatemalan democracy after 1985. As what Brett calls a *popularista* organization, CONIC instead stressed class interests, particularly the struggle for land, rather than indigenous identity. The DM came later and merged both tendencies. Brett argues that the different agendas of these organizations reflect the gradual opening of Guatemalan society and a changing international context.

Interestingly, both CERJ and CONIC ran into trouble precisely as opportunities increased for social movements: CERJ failed to adapt when demands for specific rights to ethnic autonomy based on difference superseded the discourse of universal human rights, which CERJ continued to

advocate. Also, CONIC found that it could not achieve its objective of land redistribution even when it couched its demands in the politically more acceptable language of indigenous rights. This was because land redistribution had been taken off the table to ensure the participation of economic and political elites in the peace negotiations. "Some rights," Brett notes, "are more negotiable than others" (205).

Brett's thoughtful analysis of the emergence of indigenous politics in the extraordinarily repressive context of Guatemala is an important contribution. Unfortunately, he largely loses sight of the larger issue with which he begins: alternative ways of theorizing collective action.

The two historians in our set, Marc Becker and Laura Gotkowitz, give remarkably parallel studies of the emergence of indigenous activism in Bolivia and Ecuador, respectively. Both focus on the early twentieth century, with some background in the late nineteenth, and both rely heavily on intimate knowledge of a single local case. For Becker, this case is the canton of San Pedro de Cayambe, northeast of Quito in the highlands, a town with a very long history of peasant and indigenous political organization. Gotkowitz's focus is the department of Cochabamba, particularly the more northern, higher-altitude sections. Gotkowitz carries her narrative up to the Revolution of 1952, while Becker's runs into the twenty-first century.

Both authors are concerned with what we might call the outside agitator as an alleged cause of peasant and indigenous political mobilization. Analyzing the careers of several local activists and the histories of important indigenous and peasant organizations, each shows that the story is more complicated than the familiar conservative allegation that "our Indians" would be happy if it weren't for the outsiders. Reality is also more complicated than the populist myth of "the people" spontaneously rising up to demand justice. Both authors document a long-standing dialogue between local activists and national leftist leaders in which the latter adapt to, accommodate, and learn from the former. At the same time, local leaders relied heavily on support from the national left to spotlight local repression and to get their cause on the national agenda.

The two books nonetheless differ, both because of the authors' perspectives and because of differences between Bolivia and Ecuador. Gotkowitz is the more conventional historian in that she is not making an overt political argument. Her broad sympathy with indigenous and peasant movements for social justice is certainly clear, but it is also clear that she is trying to be as objective as humanly possible and to keep the spotlight off herself as author. In contrast, Becker comes closest to anthropologist Speed in the set of authors considered here: he both studies and promotes the indigenous movements of Ecuador. Moreover, the reader is left with no doubt that he sympathizes with the Partido Comunista Ecuatoriano as it led the way in

mobilizing peasants and indigenous people earlier in the century. Indeed, Becker seems to lament the failure of the party to adapt to the emergence of a major national indigenous movement starting in the 1980s.

Ecuador and Bolivia, both Andean countries with large indigenous populations, differ in their twentieth-century political trajectories. The indigenous are a clear majority in Bolivia, yet comprise only about one-third of the Ecuadorean population. Bolivia experienced the Revolution of 1952, whereas Ecuador has nothing remotely comparable. Bolivia has a much longer trajectory of militant organization and mobilization by workers, peasants, and indigenous people. For Ecuador, the major national mobilization by the *Confederación de Nacionalidades Indígenas de Ecuador* in 1990 was a breakthrough, but it has yet to lead to control of the state by the indigenous movement. For Bolivia, the years since 1980 have seen repeated waves of militancy by workers, peasants, and indigenous, activity that builds on previous national mobilizations even before 1952, as Gotkowitz documents.

Both Becker and Gotkowitz provide important contributions. Gotkowitz effectively documents the long history of indigenous organization and protest as setting the conditions for the 1952 revolution, and indeed for the indigenous movement's rise to control of the state with Evo Morales. Similarly, Becker provides a detailed history of indigenous political organization back to the early twentieth century and documents the complex, two-way relationship between indigenous leaders and the national left.

Donna Lee Van Cott helps extend the comparison between Bolivia and Ecuador. She studies the political and cultural origins of democratic institutional innovation through analysis of municipal reform in ten indigenous-dominated communities, exploring the circumstances in which newly active indigenous people in Bolivia and Ecuador will be able to institute effective democracy at the local level.

Comparison of cases leads to an interaction model between three major factors: effective mayoral leadership, a bottom-driven and flexible institutional context, and a cohesive organic party with civil society support (220–222). Thus, an institutional context resistant to change (e.g., a municipal council dominated by local vested interest) will prevent an innovative mayor from accomplishing much. Conversely, in the absence of an effective and innovative mayor, a flexible institutional context will not suffice for institutional innovation. Both the institutional context and the mayor depend on a strong party with a mass base and roots in civil society, as such a party can energize institutions and build support for the mayor's agenda. The party, in turn, can accomplish little without an effective mayor and a flexible institutional context. The odds are therefore stacked against effective democratic reform; even when this happens, it reflects a fleeting alignment of favorable conditions that are difficult to institutionalize.

Thus, in Guamote and Guaranda, Ecuador, strong mayors with favorable conditions were able to push through promising institutional reforms, but these collapsed under their less able successors. In Bolivia, the successful mobilization of the indigenous majority has led to complete dominance of local politics by indigenous parties and movements, and to significant redistribution of resources in favor of the (mostly indigenous) poor, but it has been difficult to institutionalize democracy at the local level. Instead, mayors have short terms and are subject to removal by popular movements. Political practices may be compatible with a radical notion of majority rule, but they entail violence and intimidation of opponents, quite contrary to standards of conventional liberal democracy. In short, the people—the indigenous majority—have come to power through social movements and political parties, and to rule without regard to their opponents in the higher orders of society.

This is democracy as unrestricted majority rule, which has the virtue of giving real power to the majority and the vice of having no checks against tyranny, either by the majority or by those who purport to speak for the majority. Liberal democracy, which Van Cott seems to prefer, has the opposite virtue and vice: it guards against tyranny and against unrestricted majority rule.⁵

Building on many years of studying indigenous politics in the Andes, Van Cott provides a careful and thoughtful analysis of what happens when democracy brings indigenous parties and movements to local power. The obstacles to building high-quality democracy are daunting. Gow, on the basis of his analysis of local planning in indigenous communities in Colombia, would not be surprised.

Together, these seven books provide windows on how three disciplines—anthropology, history, and political science—approach and use the phenomenon of indigenous politics in Latin America. Each discipline has its own theoretical controversies and its own distinctive discourse, yet, broadly speaking, each is experiencing the struggle between positivistic social science, with its aspiration to objective observation and analysis, and an alternative (if not insurgent) social science that seeks to contribute, with its analysis, to the liberation of its subjects. If traditional social science has been justly accused of a status quo bias, radical social science is even clearer about its bias for the oppressed. But scholars on both sides in each of the disciplines might well ask whether they have been as useful to their indigenous subjects as their subjects have been to them.

5. See John Peeler, *Building Democracy in Latin America*, 3rd ed. (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2009), chap. 7.