

THE “INDIAN QUESTION”
IN LATIN AMERICA:
Class, State, and Ethnic Identity Construction

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THE FRIENDLY LIQUIDATION OF THE PAST: THE POLITICS OF DIVERSITY IN LATIN AMERICA. Donna Lee Van Cott. Foreword by Crawford Young. (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2000. Pp. xv+340.)

EXILES, ALLIES, REBELS: BRAZIL'S INDIANIST MOVEMENT, INDIGENIST POLITICS, AND THE IMPERIAL NATION-STATE. By David Treece. (Westport, Conn., and London: Greenwood Press, 2000. Pp. viii+271.)

THE INDIANS AND BRAZIL. By Mercio P. Gomes. Translated by John W. Moon. (Gainesville, Fla.: University Press of Florida, 2000. Pp. xvi +301.)

INDIGENISMO E TERRITORIALIZAÇÃO: PODERES, ROTINAS E SABERS COLONIAIS NO BRASIL CONTEMPORÂNEO. Edited by João Pacheco de Oliveira. (Rio de Janeiro: Contra Capa Livraria, 1998. Pp. 311.)

TELLING MAYA TALES: TZOTZIL IDENTITIES IN MODERN MEXICO. By Gary H. Gossen. (New York and London: Routledge, 1999. Pp. xxxiii+309.)

INDIGENOUS AUTONOMY IN MEXICO. Edited by Aracely Burgete Cal y Mayor. (Copenhagen: International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs, 2000. Pp. 291.)

The purpose of this essay is to assess a group of recent books about the “Indian question” in Latin America. We have witnessed widespread and vigorous mobilization by indigenous peasantries throughout the

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region in the past two decades, so it is no coincidence that these and many other books have recently been published on this issue. For the case of Mexico, following the 1994 uprising by the Zapatista National Liberation Army (EZLN), Carlos Monsiváis (1999) has claimed that more books were published about the Indian question between 1994 and 1999 than during the rest of the twentieth century. Even if this is an exaggerated statement, the fact remains that this topic is of growing scholarly interest and of paramount political relevance for Latin America's weak democratic regimes. In fact, one could argue that the manner in which Latin American states address their relations with their Indian peoples will largely determine the character and depth of democratic transitions. The ruling classes have the choice: to keep Indians as the most exploited, oppressed, and politically excluded groups in society, or to acknowledge and institutionalize their rights, not only on paper but in fact. To an increasing extent, though, this is not just a matter of choice from above, but also an increasingly imperative exigency from indigenous mobilization from below.

Three core arguments that I will make in reviewing these books are as follows. First, in contrast to some recent theorization about social movements in Latin America, which emphasizes either a class-based approach (Petras and Veltmeyer 2001) or an identity-based approach (Alvares, Dagnino, and Escobar 1998), I will argue that in the case of indigenous-peasant mobilization, class and identity struggles are actually inseparable. Emphasizing one or another determinant or "variable" will necessarily lead to an incomplete and one-sided analysis. If there is any subordinate social group in Latin America for which both class grievances and identity rights issues are similarly important in their constitution as political subjects, it is the indigenous population. Paradoxically, this population was constituted as "Indians" by the conquering forces from Europe. By the late twentieth century, Native Americans began to use this same label, historically employed to exploit and oppress them, to liberate themselves. In many cases, they are using colonial documents to demand land rights and they are adopting the term "Indians" to designate themselves. The concluding section offers some research questions on Indian mobilization based on a synthetic approach to its study.

The second argument regards the relation between globalization and the nation-state. Along with the implicit positions of most of the books under review, I will argue that the nation-state continues to be the ultimate terrain of struggle for indigenous peasants, even if transnational or international solidarity is welcome and can help in some dramatic instances. This is an argument against those who claim that the forces of globalization have fundamentally debilitated nation-states, and that the fate of social movements now depends on the degree and extent of international solidarity. On the contrary, nation-states continue to be a

critical sphere for the imposition of ruling capitalist interests. Any substantial modifications in the economic, political, and cultural conditions of subordinate groups and classes will have to be fought and won at this level, even if international solidarity will always be a welcome—but not *the* determinant—ingredient.

Third, given the demands of most Indian peoples in Latin America—which include land, territory, autonomy, self-governance, and rights to their cultural specificities—satisfying them will require state reform. The liberal ideology that has been in place since independence in most of Latin America is only capable of recognizing individual rights as the basis of equality. Yet, Indian peoples also demand that their communal property and cultural rights be institutionally acknowledged. The distinction between “land” and “territory” is critical in this context. Territory calls for a deeper meaning than the mere transferability of land ownership in market transactions. Territory alludes to the relation between humans and nature, and its users must ensure the possibility of its “ecological/cultural sustainability for the forthcoming generations” (Delgado P. 2002, 38). It is not that Indians want sovereignty over their territory, but they do want autonomy and self-governance in its management. Only a small minority of Indian groups demand full sovereignty from national states. The vast majority, however, demand state reforms so that their right to difference within equality be respected. Interestingly, such *cosmovisión*, or worldview, open to diversity has always been present in Indian societies. The intransigence of ruling conquering groups, though, has prevented them from seeing any value in accepting cultural difference. Latin American ruling classes will have to understand that such acknowledgment entails not a weakening but a strengthening of the state, not its impoverishment but its enrichment, the seeking of unity in diversity not in uniformity.² Most of the books under review tend to support these three arguments, especially the last.

INDIAN STRUGGLES, CONSTITUTIONAL TRANSFORMATION, AND PLURINATIONALITY

The Friendly Liquidation of the Past: The Politics of Diversity in Latin America, by Donna Lee Van Cott, is a refreshing contribution to the literature on democratization and indigenous rights. While some of the most prominent political scientists (e.g., Terry Karl, Scott Mainwaring, Philippe Schmitter, and Guillermo O'Donnell) have been settling for a “minimalist,” procedural definition of democracy, Van Cott expects a normative transformation that goes well beyond regime change. At least in her case studies of Bolivia and Colombia, to properly address the

2. For a philosophical defense of diversity and multiculturalism in Latin America, see Olivé (1999) and Salmerón (1998).

secular problem of exclusion, “constitution-makers also found it necessary to transform the state, particularly with respect to its territorial organization and legality” (4). Van Cott’s contribution, therefore, goes beyond the liberal, Western constitutional tradition in Latin America, to identify a type of democratization that approximates the indigenous cosmivision. Within this cosmivision, politics is embedded in a larger ethical and cultural universe, and citizens voluntarily obey the law because they accept it, rather than fear punishment.

Van Cott’s book is based on a wealth of primary materials, including two hundred interviews with political actors at all levels. Her secondary sources span well beyond her two case studies, and we find frequent comparisons with constitutional experiences in other Latin American countries and post-communist transitions in East Europe. She offers a 35-page analytical introduction, with a series of ex-post hypotheses on the political conditions for “constitutional transformation,” followed by two parts with three chapters each devoted to Colombia and Bolivia, respectively. Part 3 is also analytical, with one chapter that assesses the extent to which advancement has been made in constitutional transformation and implementation in her two cases, and the other with a very useful comparison (if somewhat repetitive on some issues) of multicultural constitutionalism in Latin America. Make no mistake about it: *The Friendly Liquidation of the Past* will be a central contribution on the advancement and limitations in the struggle by Indian peoples to institutionalize their social, political, and cultural advancements in becoming recognized by states as collective subjects of rights.

It is still too early to make a balance sheet of Bolivia and Colombia, according to Van Cott, but clear limitations are emerging. Her assessment of the limited experience so far (1991–99 in Colombia, 1994–99 in Bolivia) is based on analyzing measures of improved political representation and participation, and the effect of special measures to recognize and extend special rights to previously marginalized ethnic groups. She then presents indicators of inequality and violence to look for improvements. Unfortunately, improvements on all counts are rather limited, and a number of aspects have worsened (particularly violence in Colombia). With regard to decentralization, for instance, local rulers have increased their power in both cases. The representation of women has not improved in either of the two cases. On the positive side, access to public office has increased for marginalized groups in both countries, and so has the representation of the indigenous population. A downside of Indian participation in electoral politics, though, has been a fragmentation of their organizations that has resulted from various non-indigenous parties trying to lure Indian representatives to their ranks. Another problem has resulted from the clash of conceptions about representation. While the liberal meaning tends to see representatives

as independent, with the possibility of changing their positions, the indigenous conception tends to favor the notion of a mandate, arrived at consensually by the representative's constituency (or by traditional authorities). If constitutional transformation outcomes can be labeled as either "negative," "mixed," or "creative," then those in Colombia and Bolivia would be of the "mixed" kind. For Van Cott, however, they both contain considerable promise for moving forward into outcomes that are more creative.

The greatest achievements in constitutional transformation in Bolivia and Colombia have been symbolic, with the recognition of indigenous rights and the characterization of both societies as "multiethnic and pluricultural." The least progress has been made with respect to the establishment of extensive autonomous regions under indigenous authority. While this was one of the greatest aspirations of indigenous peoples, constitutions tend to favor autonomy only at levels below the municipality. As Van Cott concludes, the "long-term satisfaction of rights claims depends mainly on the ability of indigenous organizations to achieve internal political unity, to forge alliances with nonindigenous sectors, and to maintain at least passive support from the public" (244). The contribution of Indian struggles to Latin American democratization lies in infusing the political culture with values of participation, inclusion, and tolerance. Rather than debilitating the state, conceding spheres of autonomy to the peoples that constitute it "is a strategy for strengthening the state itself, by increasing its capacity to dispense justice and protect rights" (278).

BRAZIL: FROM EXTERMINATION TO DEMOGRAPHIC RENAISSANCE

David Treece's *Exiles, Allies, Rebels: Brazil's Indianist Movement, Indigenist Politics, and the Imperial Nation-State* provides a valuable supplement to anthropological accounts of the emergence of *indigenismo* and *indianismo* in Brazilian policy and literature, respectively, by focusing on literary production during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in Brazil. If anthropological studies focus on indigenous groups themselves, literary texts constitute primarily an account of the ways in which intellectual members of the ruling or middle classes view Indians. Given that interethnic relations are the product of social relations with "Others," it is quite instructive to see how Latin American ruling and middle classes viewed the native populations. This is not to say that the Brazilian ruling class or the literary community had a homogeneous view of the Indian. Far from that, Indianist writing displayed a diverse and contradictory spectrum of ideological perspectives. In contrast with most literary analyses of Indianism, Treece's contribution makes a concerted effort to provide the historical context

for the emergence of specific literary texts. Treece guards himself from a facile dependency argument, which might attribute the emergence of conservative or liberal romantic ideas about indigenous groups directly to the influence of European thought. In contrast, Treece establishes the connection between Brazilian socioeconomic conditions and the rise of certain ideologies. He does not attempt to posit ideologies as mere reflections of society, but also assigns a specific autonomous weight to ideas in determining social and policy changes. The chief contrast with European social thought of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries is that Brazilian Indianist literature is based on a monumental irony. As “the heroic protagonist of scores of novels, poems, plays, paintings, and ethnographic studies, mourned or celebrated, as exile, ally, or rebel, the Indian became the embodiment of the very nationalism that was engaged in his own annihilation” (3). One of the most glaring disparities with European liberalism of the nineteenth century lies in the social basis for prosperity of the Brazilian ruling class (or “elite,” as Treece calls it): slavery and patronage.

Important contrasts between the ruling classes of Brazil and those of Spanish American emerging nations help to explain significant differences in their approaches toward the “Indian question.” First, unlike former Spanish colonies, Brazil did not sever ties with Portugal by military confrontation, but retained a centralized monarchy through the late nineteenth century. Second, Brazil avoided the fragmentation into a multiplicity of nation-states, remaining as a single political entity over three million square kilometers in size with regions of remarkable diversity in ethnic, cultural, geographical, and economic terms. Finally, in contrast with the large Indian populations of the Andes and Mesoamerica, which had centralized state structures and ruling classes prior to European colonization, Brazil’s indigenous population was fragmented into many relatively small tribal communities whose livelihoods depended more on hunting and gathering than on agriculture.

While Indians confronted a policy of extermination until the first half of the nineteenth century, Indianist literature recorded the destruction of an ideal, natural society by the modern, colonial civilization of Europe. The Indian was thus relegated to a mythical past, and sexual relations between Indians and whites were regarded as doomed to failure, offering no hope for its offspring. By the 1850s, however, policy and discourse changed from extermination to the intent of “integration” (which really signified “assimilation”). The most radical integrationist voices called for reintroducing pioneer slaving expeditions to subject the Indian to white control and “free” his lands for exploitation by Brazilian and immigrant settlers. In the end, “integration” catered to the interests of the *latifundista* agrarian structure by incorporating Indian labor and land to it. “Brazilianness” was being invented around

this time, as nationhood beyond all divisions. As Treece points out, a striking feature of Indianist literature at this time is that reference to African slavery was all but absent. The image of the "ideal slave," however, became prominent: the Indian warrior who voluntarily serves a landlord. Treece argues that Indianismo of this period (post-1850s) was bound up ideologically with the needs of the ruling class to legitimate its extremely illiberal exploitation of African labor. Linked to this theme was that of "miscegenation," or the mixing of "races": the *mestiço* offspring of Indian and white offered a foundation for a harmonious integration of "races, classes, and cultures." At this point, the Indian is no longer destroyed and sent into a mythical past but survives into the future as a democratizing and moderating force in modern Brazil.

By the end of the Empire (1888), however, integrationist forces were once again expressed in Indianist literature, this time claiming roots in a "universalist" cultural perspective. Its significance amounted to a rejection of the traditional, indigenous, and rural emphasis of colonial and imperial history in favor of modern, European models of civilization and capitalist development. As Treece concludes, the "Indianist imaginary could only ever manufacture Imperial subjects, never citizens" (248). The great irony is that indigenous culture has itself "always offered alternative models for thinking the relationship between individual and community, self and other, for imagining forms of social interaction and coexistence in which difference and identification, autonomy and integration, collective self-realization and the realization of the individual might be compatible, rather than mutually exclusive" (248).

The Indians and Brazil by Mercio P. Gomes, a veteran anthropologist, has the ambitious goal of showing that Brazilian Indians are experiencing a "demographic turnaround." Whereas their numbers continually declined since the European invasion in 1500, as of about 1970, they have actually started to climb again. By his estimation, there were five million Indians in 1500; falling to a low of 120,000 in 1955; but then rising to about 350,000 at the turn of the twenty-first century. If this is Gomes's chief empirical claim, his theoretical argument is that the acculturation paradigm in anthropology, which had been used to interpret the Indian question until the late 1980s, is only half right (x). In his view, even anthropologists who set out to defend the possibility of Indian survival, like Darcy Ribeiro, concluded their analyses with the certainty that Brazilian Indians would disappear as such and become integrated into mainstream society (for an alternative view that posits Ribeiro as a full-fledged integrationist, see Ramos 1998). The acculturation paradigm, it turns out, was a consensus based on the ideology of Western civilization, constructed on its relentless advancement in controlling the world. In this process, says Gomes, Western civilization

fabricates its self-image partly by contrasting itself with others, such as the “egalitarian peoples” or the Indians of Brazil. Gomes is successful in demonstrating his empirical claim, but he only partially sheds the paternalism of most theory and policy about Brazil’s Indians that preceded his book. Nevertheless, this is a book full of valuable information, analysis, and insight, even if wordy and repetitive at times.

Gomes invokes three core reasons for the Indian demographic turnaround. One is the qualitative change in public health conditions in humankind during the twentieth century. The second is the anthropological practice of defending Indian rights, which he prescribes as a new, “prospective” style of doing anthropology. It consists not just in the empirical and theoretical claim that Indians will survive, but also in the practice of anthropologists to do all they can to make it happen. The third reason is that indigenous peoples themselves have risen up to organize and to generate a leadership for increasing political representation and legitimacy. Regardless of the diversity of Indian cultures in Brazil, the chief common element is that they all depend on access to their traditional lands and territories in order to continue with their own identities and cultures. Therefore, land and territory has been the constant object of struggle. Thus, against the voices of doom about the fate of Brazilian Indians (e.g., Marxists and capitalists, evolutionists and cultural relativists, materialists and idealists, hard-core scientists and postmodernists), Gomes sets out to counter their visions and find viable ways to increase the productivity of “egalitarian economies” (xvi *passim*).

As may be seen from the last point about productivity, Gomes also has a developmentalist agenda, so to speak. Moreover, this agenda is probably what renders much of his otherwise highly informative and insightful book an ambivalent enterprise. While he forcefully critiques the acculturation paradigm, Gomes also presents the very many obstacles and anti-Indian forces that have to be overcome for Indian survival. Such ambivalence comes from two sources: one valid, the other questionable. The first regards the conflictive nature of social relations around land and natural resources in Brazil. The second source of ambiguity, however, is the author’s own indecisiveness. While he forcefully critiques Brazilian paternalism toward Indians and proposes that they should be treated as adult citizens and partners in future development, he at times adopts a clearly paternalistic attitude. This comes out particularly with regard to how Indians are to manage their resources in the future (assuming that Indians will indeed control them). While he describes Indians as proven experts in managing their natural resources, he also posits that the forces of money and consumerism are too strong for Indians to face without losing their identity. In his view, such a loss would come at a double cost: indigenous cultures and the environment. It is at this point that Gomes becomes paternalistic,

raising questions such as: “How will the Brazilian congress legislate this matter so that the Indians do not give themselves totally over to this distortion [of enjoying the allurements of civilization or simply living off the royalties from minerals found on their lands]”? (239)

This question reveals either a prior distrust of Indian capabilities for self-management, or the assumption (from the acculturation paradigm) that they will be simply too weak to resist the capitalistic juggernaut. This ambivalence in Gomes also exposes his inconsistency of goals. On page 15 he asserts that he writes this book from the point of view of surviving Indians (presumably self-appointed), not of Brazilian society; on page 27 he says that he writes from *both* points of view. Such explicit inconsistency of goals, it seems, has resulted in similarly overt ambivalence on how to see Indians and their relation to Brazilian society. To be fair, however, Gomes’s predominant concern is clearly with enhancing the possibilities for Indian survival. This survival, however, would have to take place by retaining Indian culture, even if its current subjects were to choose otherwise.

In conclusion, Indians in Brazil have faced an extremely repressive and limited set of “structures of political opportunities.” In contrast to the dominant practice of extermination and exploitation, the Portuguese Crown’s policies seem to have been guided by guilt feelings. Even if it was rarely respected, legislation during the colony amounted to the recognition of the sovereignty of Indian peoples and their natural right to their lands. Today, these legal instruments are providing jurists and legal anthropologists, as well as Indian leaders, with arguments for a historical recognition of Indian rights over their lands. Gomes points to 1841 as the end of the military stage of the Indian question, a point at which the state started to make concerted attempts at incorporating Indians into mainstream society. Over a century of integrationist policies followed during which many Indian cultures continued to disappear. Yet, during the 1950s Indians began to organize and by the 1970s began to see a population increase. Although Gomes calls for overcoming paternalism, some of his proposals remain top-down, and there is little suggestion that Indians might be left alone to determine the ways in which they are to survive. Gomes considers, however, that Indians’ “political and cultural activities as a self-conscious collective will be the new factor in the unfair political equation in which they are involved” (174). Indians have most likely been self-conscious before, but they had fewer resources and faced more insurmountable structures of political opportunities. The new democratic conditions and invigorated leadership should enhance the possibilities for Indians to continue along the path of becoming the subjects of their own destiny.

The chapters contained in *Indigenismo e territorialização: Poderes, rotinas e sabers coloniais no Brasil contemporâneo*, organized by João Pacheco de

Oliveira, were originally published between 1983 and 1994 (most of them on the earlier side). The reason invoked to release them again in book form is that earlier publications had been issued in obscure outlets and many were out of print. Some of the core quantitative data provided have changed, but Oliveira provides some useful updates in his presentation. For instance, the total amount of Indian territories officially recognized in the early 1980s (as either *demarcadas*, *identificadas*, or *a identificar*) amounted to over forty million hectares. The figures to arrive at these estimates, however, assumed a much smaller Indian population. By 1998, with considerably increased Indian population, estimates for their territories had risen to ninety million hectares. Because most of the papers engage in an ethnography of public policy making vis-à-vis Brazil's Indians, and the central forces shaping it have not changed very much, these texts continue to provide very useful information and analysis. Another noteworthy change in policy regards the FUNAI, the main government agency that addresses Indian issues, including demarcation of their territories. Toward the end of the twentieth century, FUNAI had progressively reduced its disregard of indigenous demands for land, as well as its systematic lack of trust or acknowledgment of recent ethnic mobilizations.

Indigenismo e territorialização does not see Indians as inherently vulnerable, with a presumed tendency to extinction. These were never natural components of their existence before the colony. Rather, vulnerability and ethnocide were the result of efforts by the ruling classes to institute homogeneity and to abolish cultural, religious, and political differences by iron and fire. The book thus attempts to dissect colonial powers, routines, and knowledge in their specificity, rather than accepting the explanations offered by dominant social actors, whose values and interests they were trying to guarantee.

Perhaps the most useful chapter is the first one by João Pacheco de Oliveira, *Redimensionando a questão indígena no Brasil: Uma etnografia das terras indígenas*, where he sets out the national-level panorama of Indian land territorialization as of 1983. Historically, although the state has designed some legal provisions against the encroachment of whites on Indian lands, these have rarely been enforced. Consequently, there have been all too many cases of usurpation of Indian lands with no indemnity by loggers, mining prospectors, and agriculturalists.

If it may be argued that anthropologists hold the most knowledge about Indians, in Brazil they only know the specific situations of about one fourth of them. Given that FUNAI relies largely on anthropological knowledge, vast extensions of land remain undefined. In fact, FUNAI's classification of Indian land is as follows: (a) demarcated, (b) identified but not demarcated, and (c) yet to be identified. The 1973 legislation

had given FUNAI five years to complete the demarcation process, and twice this grace period had already lapsed by 1983. After new deadlines for demarcation had come and gone by 1993, some twenty to thirty percent of Indian lands had still not been provided with any legal guarantee by the state. All things considered, says Gomes in *The Indians and Brazil*, “neither the Indians nor the rest of the Brazilian people should count on the good intentions of any government toward the defense of the Indian” (238).

Oliveira found a most interesting correlation, as to which lands have been demarcated and which have not. The greatest efficiency in land demarcation has taken place in the areas of greatest European pioneer advancement (with the consequent deepening of market relations), such as southern Brazil. Conversely, in areas of large Indian concentration but low demographic density for non-Indians, the demarcation process has hardly advanced. Somewhere in between lie the showcases of official *indigenismo*, such as the Parque Indígena do Xingu. Another correlation (that the author fails to point out) is that the highest Indian identity and mobilization also take place in those areas of greatest and most dense contact with whites—in southern Brazil. This point highlights the relational nature of ethnicity and identity politics.

Have FUNAI’s demarcation actions awarded “too much” land to Indian peoples? This has been a recurrent question in Brazilian public debates during the past three decades. Oliveira makes it clear that the types of land generally awarded to Indians and their low level of technology use require vast extensions for economic exploitation in a sustainable manner. Therefore, these surfaces cannot be directly compared with those held by other landlords. Furthermore, the figures should be placed in the larger context of land ownership: it so happens that “the 307 largest landholdings in Brazil, owned by an infinitesimal portion of the national population, account for an area roughly equal to half the total amount of land occupied by indigenous peoples” (Ramos 1998, 4).

The rest of *Indigenismo e territorialização* addresses specific agencies or aspects of the state that deal with the question of Indian lands. We can ascertain from the foregoing that the class structural processes for Brazil’s Indian peoples have moved predominantly along two poles. Either they have been allotted meager land surfaces, a situation that has soon led to their proletarianization; or they have been awarded larger tracts of land, which have been sufficient for them to reproduce their livelihoods as Indian peasants. Still, for a substantial portion of Brazilian Indians, the legal status of their lands remains “to be identified” and therefore demarcated. This ambiguous status leaves them in a vulnerable situation, subject to the incursions of mine prospectors, loggers, and landlords. Such vulnerability decreases or increases, most

likely, depending on the relative attractiveness of their resources and their potential for profit making.

MEXICO: THE EZLN UPRISING, PAN-MAYAN SOUL, AND INDIAN AUTONOMY

To a greater or lesser extent, the two books reviewed on Mexico take off from the backdrop of the political earthquake of 1994: the uprising of the Zapatista National Liberation Army (EZLN) on 1 January. In important ways, these two books supplement each other, by the topics they cover and the authors' backgrounds. The topics vary from narrowly defined identities, to concrete experiences in building autonomous municipal governance from the bottom up. Both authors include indigenous representatives of social and political organizations, as well as anthropologists.

Gary H. Gossen, a seasoned anthropologist with extensive field experience in Chiapas from the time of the "Harvard Chiapas Project" in the 1960s, compiled several previously published and some unpublished papers into his *Telling Maya Tales: Tzotzil Identities in Modern Mexico*. His long preface tries to come to terms with his own career as an anthropologist, but also as a person who had always been attempting to describe "the Other." He tells of how, essentially by peer pressure, he recently shifted from structuralism to postmodernism. This change is clearly expressed in some inconsistency between the various chapters, most of which focus on Chamula, the largest indigenous municipality, which also lies in the closest proximity to San Cristóbal de las Casas, the colonial capital of Chiapas. Yet, Gossen's book offers many pieces of rich ethnography and interesting—if debatable—interpretation. It provides useful insights into Chamula-Tzotzil culture, one which has been heavily influenced by corporatist relations with the former ruling Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) through its indigenist policies since the 1940s.

Besides providing a contemporary picture of religious and other cultural rituals, Gossen attempts to establish the connections between current and ancestral Maya culture. Chapter 6, in collaboration with an archaeologist, draws the continuities of what he calls the "Maya soul." While Gossen qualifies the extent of such continuities, and often says that culture adapts continually to current challenges, he does incur in structuralist essentialism in attempting to argue for the current emergence of a "Pan-Maya soul" as expressed in the Zapatista movement. The central point he misses, though, is that the Zapatistas' goal is not to establish a homogeneous culture or soul across ethnic groups. To the contrary, they have unified politically in order to enable their cultural specificities to thrive.

Indigenous Autonomy in Mexico, edited by Mexican anthropologist Aracely Burguete Cal y Mayor, contains an assortment of essays by scholars, activists and Indian representatives of a variety of social and political organizations of diverse ideological and political leanings. Its greatest value for English readers lies in the evaluations and “systematizations” of the struggle for autonomy provided by activists and Indian representatives, which rarely become translated. Articles by well-known scholars Rodolfo Stavenhagen, Hector Díaz-Polanco, and that by Aracely Burguete Cal y Mayor herself are also quite valuable. The variety of experiences with indigenous autonomy told in this book is remarkable. We learn of the Yaqui Indians’ historic struggle for autonomy in northwestern Mexico from Hilario Molina.

Margarito Ruiz Hernández traces the history of the legislative struggle for autonomy of the Indian peoples of Mexico on a national level. His chapter describes the history of “The Plural National Indigenous Assembly for Autonomy (ANIPA),” which dates back to 1990. One of the key goals of this organization is to create a fourth level of government, between municipalities and states: the pluriethnic autonomous regions, or RAPs by its Spanish acronym. A “Council of Representatives” would be the highest body of authority in the RAPs: “All ethnic groups (both Indian and non-Indian) would be represented equally within this body, regardless of the demographic weight of each.” This body would be elected by direct and secret universal vote every three years, “according to a principle of relative majority rule” (25).

ANIPA has been one of the key organizations to influence the EZLN’s agenda after its uprising in 1994, but it had been engaged in organizational building and mobilizations in the previous years. In fact, the EZLN did not originally focus on indigenous issues, nor was the Indian movement its key interlocutor. Yet, all the organizations that previously made up the Mexican 500 Years Council, which in 1994 were awarded the “Roque Dalton Medal,” decided to ally itself with the EZLN Command. For them, the EZLN represented “‘the smallest star, chosen to be at the front’ of the universe of indigenous resistance” (28).

Unfortunately, this good beginning for bilateral relations became strained when direct communication with the EZLN was discontinued following the entry onto the scene of ‘advisors’, some of whom robbed the indigenous struggle of its right to express its own thoughts, feelings, proposals and projects for a desirable society. (28)

As will be seen below, this presence of advisors in the indigenous movement has been a considerable source of friction.

The earliest oppositional struggle for municipal autonomy in the last fourth of the twentieth century took place in Juchitán, Oaxaca. A description of this struggle is given by its legendary leader and former municipal president, Leopoldo de Gyves. One highlight is the ways in

which the regional social organization has related to a national-level political party on the left. The Coalición de Obreros, Campesinos y Estudiantes del Istmo (COCEI) established an alliance on a one-to-one basis with Mexico's main party of the left (now called Partido de la Revolución Democrática, or PRD). De Gyves considers that this is an exemplary relationship of autonomy to be used by other social organizations that have sympathies and form coalitions with the PRD. One of de Gyves' main concerns is for Indian municipalities to achieve substantial state reforms to make federalism a reality. This would strengthen local governments and contribute to deepening the democratic struggle.

Marcelino Díaz de Jesús and Pedro de Jesús Alejandro write about the struggle for autonomy of Nahua Indians in the region of Alto Balsas, state of Guerrero. These peoples of Guerrero, like those in Chiapas, have been implementing de facto autonomy "without asking permission from power" (157). Political autonomy in this region, then, is going well ahead of Mexican legislation.

Within the southeastern state of Chiapas, to which six chapters are devoted in *Indigenous Autonomy in Mexico*, experiences with autonomy are quite varied in goals, political actors, and achievements. Perhaps the core differences result from the extent to which the several regions have felt the presence of the state and its *indigenista* policy of integration into *mestizo* national society. External forces had an important impact as well, including liberation theology catechists and "advisors" or political organizers that came from Mexico's north (*los norteros*). In the central-eastern Tojolob'al region, Antonio Hernández Cruz writes that the struggle for autonomy began in the 1980s, after Indians finally succeeded in recovering land via the agrarian reform. This set the conditions for autonomy, which changed in character several times in the past two decades. Unlike the Chiapas highlands (Los Altos), where many of the indigenist policies were focused and the state became hegemonic, the Tojolab'al region had a very weak state presence. This situation helped strengthen Tojolab'al autonomy.

As mentioned above, even if Mexican legislation has not been adequately adjusted to the Mexican government's international commitments to recognize their rights, Indian peoples in several states, including several in Chiapas, have gone forward with their own practices of municipal autonomy. Marcelino Gómez Nunez's chapter in *Indigenous Autonomy in Mexico* is about "Autonomous Pluriethnic Regions (RAP): The Many Paths to *de Facto* Autonomy." He offers a detailed account of how the movement for autonomy was consolidated after the 1994 EZLN uprising.

Miguel González Hernández and Elvia Quintanar Quintanar write about "The Construction of the Autonomous North Region and the Exercise of Municipal Government" in Chiapas. They open by saying

that the goal of Chiapas Indians is to be recognized as “peoples with their own territory, identity, culture, and rights, and not as marginalized people” (194). The north region, which encompasses eight municipalities, is eighty per cent Indian. Its people have had a successful struggle to recover land via three phases. First, about twenty-two per cent of their former territory was recovered through agrarian reform in the Cardenista period (1934–40) and then in the 1970s. This access to land enabled the economic and cultural reproduction of Indian groups. By 1994 the process of mobilization for land takeovers was heightened by the EZLN rebellion. This concluded the physical recovery of land, but not all of it has been legalized yet. A second stage has consisted in the development of a peasant economy geared to retaining its surpluses, “reincorporating and developing traditional techniques that correspond to our people’s true needs and ways of seeing life” (196–97). After the EZLN uprising, the third phase has focused on the struggle for identity and autonomy. On the political front, the struggle has focused on the fight for municipal government and for the construction of regional autonomy.

Mentioned only in passing by González and Quintanar, the northern municipalities have faced the heaviest repression from government-supported paramilitary forces, especially during 1998. Yet, those people involved in the experiences with autonomous municipalities have seen a very sharp learning curve. They have transformed the practice of government from one of power and corruption to one of service. Women, in particular, have become incorporated into leadership positions, in accordance with the Law of Women promulgated by the EZLN in 1994 (Stephen 2002, 176–215).

The experience with municipal governance in Ocosingo, the heart of the EZLN, has taken place since 1997, when Indian leaders were elected to the municipal council, according to Ricardo Hernández Arellano’s chapter. His account is based on his direct experience as a member of this council. Ocosingo is the largest of 111 municipalities in Chiapas, occupying about 15 per cent of its territory, and containing a very large nature reserve called Montes Azules in the Lacandón Forest. This is the place where the EZLN was formed, based on pioneer settlers from several parts of the state, and representing several of the Chiapas Indian ethnicities (Leyva Solano 1998; Harvey 1998; Womack 1999).

The final chapter of *Indigenous Autonomy in Mexico* by editor Aracely Burguete Cal y Mayor sets out to analyze the structural foundations of the struggle for autonomy. Entitled “Indigenous Empowerment: Trends toward Autonomy in the Altos de Chiapas Region,” this chapter addresses the region of Chiapas that has been most closely controlled by colonial authorities first, and then by the national state and local ruling classes. As mentioned, indigenist policies were applied vigorously in

Los Altos during the past half century, geared to integrate Indians into national society. Hence, Burguete begins with a very interesting paradox: It has been in this region of strong *indigenismo* where a sharp decline in *ladino-mestizo* hegemony has taken place, along with the rise of Indianismo (understood as Indian-identity building by Indians themselves). Recent years could be characterized, she argues, “by a marked sense of autonomy in indigenous actions and could well be considered as struggles of decolonization and reconquest” (original emphasis, 260). Particularly since the 1960s, there has been the growth and consolidation of an autonomous subject, i.e., indigenous empowerment. Burguete still considers that it is possible for an “ethnic co-existence” to emerge in the Los Altos cities.

THE POLITICAL CLASS FORMATION OF INDIAN PEASANTS: TOWARD A SYNTHETIC THEORY

Despite the diversity of countries addressed in the books under review, and the variety of disciplinary and theoretical perspectives they represent, it is possible to formulate a series of questions that might afford a synthetic perspective about the “Indian question” for the twenty-first century. In studying these books, I have attempted to establish in my own mind how the theory of political class formation I proposed in *Farewell to the Peasantry? Political Class Formation in Rural Mexico* (Otero 1999) might help formulate relevant questions for indigenous peasantries in Latin America. This theory addresses the relation between “class structural processes” and political class formation by going well beyond the class reductionist explanations that are common in traditional Marxism. It also assigns a critical determining role to regional cultures, in that they shape the demands posited by direct producers in the countryside. Similarly, state intervention is considered as a critical variable, as it shapes the context for rural struggles. Too often, social movements become co-opted into bourgeois-hegemonic discourse, depending on how such state interventions come about. A third mediating determination to be studied is leadership types and modes of participation,³ and how they contribute to determine whether organizations, once formed, will remain independent from the state and autonomous from other political organizations.

As we have seen, the struggles of Latin American Indian peoples have attempted to challenge the homogenizing policies of neoliberal globalism by gaining an economic and political space for autonomous development. Indigenous struggles also posit an ideological challenge to Latin America’s weak liberal democracies: They demand

3. Thanks to Heidi Jugenitz for her suggestion to include “modes of participation” as part of “leadership types.” For further elaboration of this concept, see Jugenitz (2002).

the recognition of difference, when liberal ideology cannot go beyond the legal recognition of equality for all. The success of Indian struggles in the twenty-first century must therefore be measured against this goal: can the Latin American states move beyond liberalism, to accept and respect difference? I argue that this cultural achievement requires nothing short of also gaining control over territory and natural resources. Hence, class and identity issues cannot be separated in any analysis of indigenous mobilization in Latin America.

A strong reason for elaborating some analytical questions from the theory of political class formation (PCF), therefore, is precisely that it is a synthetic theory, rather than one intent on asserting the primacy of class or identity. These analytical questions could serve for future studies of Indian-peasant movements. The first question that I would posit is: How can we characterize the “class structural processes,” or the ensemble of both relations of production (i.e., relations between exploiters and exploited) and relations of reproduction (i.e., relations among the exploited) in which direct producers are involved? Relations of reproduction are particularly important to call our attention to issues of gender relations, kinship, and community, all of which are of central importance in the reproduction (or fragmentation) of indigenous culture. The second question regards regional cultures and collective identity processes: How do direct producers conceive of themselves, and how is this identity related to their class positions on one hand, and to the formulation of their demands or objects of struggle, on the other?

Third, what has been the history of state intervention vis-à-vis the indigenous population, as to whether it has been favorable or unfavorable to their social reproduction as direct producers? Negative state interventions have at least two kinds of results. The repressive extreme has involved the physical extermination of indigenous groups, with the consequent potential loss of legitimacy vis-à-vis other groups in society and internationally. Less severe negative state interventions may result in the formation of oppositional organizations for struggle on the part of direct producers. Similarly, favorable state interventions may have at least two kinds of results. When favorable state policies emerge as top-down concessions in order to appease a social group, that group may end up becoming co-opted into bourgeois-hegemonic discourse. In contrast, when favorable state interventions result from the initiative, strength, and mobilization of a subordinate group, then it may be said to have reached its “subjective moment of struggle.” That is to say, favorable state policies that emerge from below result from politically formed groups or classes. We could say that such groups have become empowered, or turned themselves into political subjects with an ability to steer state policy in their favor. I call this a “popular-democratic” outcome.

Fourth, what are the leadership types and modes of participation among mobilized direct producers? Are leaders authoritarian and/or corrupt, and thus susceptible of co-optation into bourgeois-hegemonic discourse and politics? Alternatively, are they democratic and have the potential to preserve the independence and autonomy of resulting organizations? Are the modes of participation such that, even in the face of not achieving specific goals, the organizational capacity of the subordinate group has been enhanced for future struggles and the building of citizenship? Analysis of this dimension may well expand the notion of "success" for social movements by including the strengthening of independent and autonomous organizational capacity itself as a partial success. In fact, the proliferation of this type of organization in civil society would result in its invigoration and a changed relation of forces with political society or the state.

As may be seen, each of the four dimensions addressed in these questions relates to the internal sociopolitical dynamics in a nation-state and assumes that the impact of international relations remains constant. As Alison Brysk (2000) has argued, a fifth dimension that has affected social movements significantly since the 1990s is the extent to which they have enjoyed international solidarity. Brysk addresses the emergence of transnational civil society and the extent to which cross-border alliances determine social-movement success. While the international dimension of political struggles is indeed important, I have argued that the ultimate arbiter of social struggles will continue to be the national states in the foreseeable future. Therefore, the national-level determinants of political class formation, including that for indigenous peasants, will continue to be paramount.

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