

MARC BECKER: *Indians and Leftists in the Making of Ecuador's Modern Indigenous Movements*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008.

With this book, Marc Becker addresses a number of erroneous assumptions about Indigenous movements in Ecuador. He first takes issue with the belief that Indigenous people put an end to centuries of political passivity with what is often referred to as the first Indigenous *levantamiento* (uprising) in June 1990, when “indigenous peoples shocked the dominant *blanco-mestizo* (white) population of Ecuador with a powerful uprising that paralyzed the country for a week” (1). During this uprising they presented to Rodrigo Borja Cevallos, who was then the President from the center-left political party *Izquierda Democrática*, a list of sixteen demands for cultural, economic, and political rights, insisting that the government address long-standing and unresolved issues of land ownership, education, economic development, and the Indigenous relationship with state structures (1).

For Becker, the 1990 uprising should not be seen as the beginning of Ecuadorian modern Indigenous movements, but rather should be understood as the culmination of a long process of ongoing resistance that had been unfolding over centuries. Some of these processes of resistance had begun with the Spanish conquest, and even existed before it, in the case of the Ecuadorian Andes' rebellions against the Incas. Becker also emphasizes—and this is one of his most important contributions—the critical role since the nineteenth century played by the relationship between the Indigenous movements and the country's political left.

As Becker explains, in the nineteenth century the subordination of Indigenous peoples mainly occurred on lands operated and owned by what was then one of the most dominant economic units: the *haciendas* or *latifundios*. A series of machinations and tactics were used by estate owners, *hacendados* or *latifundistas*, to take away Indigenous lands. Once deprived of their lands, Indigenous peoples had no other choice but to work on haciendas for a meager salary and limited access to some of its resources to take care of their families. “This contracted labor system known as *concertaje* led to workers (called *conciertos*) falling deeply into debt. Landowners expected *conciertos* to mobilize their entire family's resources to complete assigned tasks on the estates. When a landowner sold a hacienda, the indebted Indians were included as part of the value of the property. Landowners worked hand in hand with civil authorities and parish priests to control Indigenous labor” (8).

Eloy Alfaro, the great leader of the 1895 Liberal Revolution, which many political parties on the left interpret as a foundational event, regulated *concertaje* without abolishing it. “He required work contracts to be signed in the presence of a civil-military authority ..., established a minimum wage, [and] outlawed

unpaid labor requirements for a concierto's family... Rather than benefiting Indigenous workers, these reforms subjugated them to an emerging central state power under elite control" (9).

Becker then engages in a critique of recent scholarship on the Ecuadorian Indian political movement, which tends to see it as distinctive because unlike other political movements in which participation is grounded on class belonging, today's Indigenous peoples have been politicized as Indians and not as peasants. This comes with the accompanying assumption that Indigenous peoples, when they have been active in politics, have tended to do so under the flag of the traditional left, which considered Indians' struggles to be secondary to the larger class struggle. Becker disagrees with the academic description of the left as a paternalistic force or even as another example of politicians taking advantage opportunistically of the poverty of Indians for their own personal gain. This, writes Becker, represents nothing but a faulty reading of history, which his book aims to correct:

Historical sources disclose that Indigenous activists in Ecuador in the 1920s and 1930s relied heavily on urban leftists to form organizations to address ethnic and structural issues... This was not a paternalistic relationship. Rural workers and urban leftist intellectuals labored together as comrades in a common struggle for social justice. Together they tried to figure out what it meant in the twentieth century to be Indian with an ethnic identity and Marxist with a class-based interpretation of the world. Among the contradictions and complications of these encounters, labor unions and political parties introduced rural activists to new tools and tactics such as demonstrations and petitions that they had developed in urban popular struggles for social justice. (10)

It is certainly a book that makes important contributions to a series of conversations about the indigenous political movements in Ecuador, and in the Andes more generally. Indeed, what is more central to the process of imagination of Ecuadorian national identity by the liberal white-mestizo elites than the specific relationship these elites maintained with Indigenous organizations? Didn't *mestizaje*, as an ideology for national identity deployed in most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century by both liberal and conservative Ecuadorian elites, incorporate—at the same time that it transformed—indigenismo? If this relationship between the (white-mestizo) leftist, urban, activists and indigenous groups wasn't tainted by paternalism, then what was it? What was in its place? How about the importance of racism? Becker attempts to answer these and other questions more or

less satisfactorily. I very much liked the way he engages with the argument of others. As I am not a specialist of Indigenous political movements, I found the book to be very informative. It should be useful in graduate seminars on Latin American contemporary politics, and related issues, because of the evidence it uses and the discussions it engages in.

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JIM SHULTZ and MELISSA CRANE DRAPER (eds.): *Dignity and Defiance. Stories from Bolivia's Challenge to Globalization*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008.

*Dignity and Defiance. Stories from Bolivia's Challenge to Globalization* is a collection of well-written essays and stories that gives a balanced and thorough report of Bolivia's problems and the challenges of globalization. It approaches the various problems from differing and at times opposite perspectives. The book also includes valuable new research with testimonies that integrate this research with the voices of those people who participated in and were affected by the issues. These personal testimonies are woven into the essays and tie the academic tone with a narrative thread. The powerful essays pull the reader directly into the struggles between communities, the government, and corporations, on issues such as water, gas, oil, external debt, and the IMF, World Bank and NGO policies. The structure and organization of each essay gives the whole book unity, bringing together first-hand information, diverse points of view, and excellent research.

The first essay, "The Cochabamba Water Revolt and Its Aftermath," written by Jim Shultz, who was present and played a major part in discovering the company behind the scenes, gives the reader an inside look at this issue. By covering the aftermath as well, Shultz brings this conflict up to the present time and reveals new information in terms of the fate of water management and the current problems faced by SEMPA (Servicio Municipal de Agua Potable y Alcantarillado). The second and third essays on the oil spill in the Desaguadero River and the fight for control of oil and gas resources are both well-researched histories of foreign intervention and control of these resources in Bolivia. "A River Turns Black," the essay by Christina Haglund, not only documents one of the gravest environmental disasters in Bolivia's history (the spread of twenty-nine thousand barrels of toxic petroleum across nearly a million acres of farm and grazing land), but it also brings the personal stories of the communities and homes affected by it, pointing out Enron's failure to accept responsibility,