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BOOK REVIEW ESSAY

Interdisciplinary perspectives on the rise and decline of indigenous organization in Ecuador

¡Pachakutik! Indigenous Movements and Electoral Politics in Ecuador. By Marc Becker. Lanham, MD and Plymouth, UK, Rowman & Littlefield, 2011.

Pachakutik and the Rise and Decline of the Ecuadorian Indigenous Movement. By Kenneth J. Mijeski and Scott H. Beck. Athens, Ohio University Press, 2011.

This review will discuss two books that explore the same topic: the impact of the use of electoral strategy on a social movement and the associated decline of ethnic organization in Ecuador. The two books, and particularly the book by Mijeski and Beck, link the decline of the Ecuadorian indigenous movement to its use of electoral politics and to its fall into politics as usual, which betrayed the high moral standards that the movement set for itself. Another reason given by the two books as well as by other analysts (see Madrid 2012) for the relative lack of political success of the Ecuadorian indigenous movement is the weakening of interethnic alliances, resulting in a narrowed down ethnic focus. Paradoxically, these changes happened in the context of the turn toward a government self-identified as being of the left.

The two books place in conversation three different disciplines: history (Becker), political science (Mijeski), and sociology (Beck). Furthermore, the author of this review essay comes from a fourth discipline, anthropology, and will contextualize these two timely volumes in relation to recent anthropological work. The books by Mijeski and Beck, and Becker share some strengths: the authors are up to date with the last political developments in Ecuador and more generally with the literature on indigenous movements, social movements, and, in the case of Becker, progressive political debates. They have impressive local knowledge, they take seriously what Ecuadorian academics and activists write, and their sound methodology helps them dispel some commonly held myths and assumptions. This is not necessarily the case for other authors working on indigenous issues. For example, within my own discipline of anthropology, some authors continue to highlight the rise of the indigenous movement and have given less emphasis to the challenges that this movement has faced in recent years (Cervone 2012; Erazo 2013). Other anthropologists could be more aware of how their more localized field sites articulate to national-level politics.

Mijeski and Beck, and Becker draw attention to the fact that Pachakutik was an intercultural movement made up of Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador (CONAIE), public sector unions, peasant organizations, urban social movements, human rights activists, feminists, and others. Many authors including myself have lightly called Pachakutik 'the political arm of CONAIE' without sufficiently acknowledging its intercultural roots. As Rappaport (2005) has noted, it is important that scholars come to terms with the intercultural origins of indigenous movements. However, one of the tensions that both books examine is Pachakutik's drift away from intercultural alliances and toward narrower indigenous constituencies and issues. One intriguing issue that is not explored in depth in the books is the nature of the interactions between indigenous people and mestizos within Pachakutik. For instance, Becker assumes that indigenous and mestizos interacted as equals in Pachakutik (46), but he does not prove this point.

Regardless, the methodological choices of these works illuminate several important aspects of the indigenous movement in Ecuador. Mijeski and Beck combine sound quantitative and qualitative analyses to challenge some widely held assumptions. By carefully examining the electoral results of the Pachakutik political movement since its launching in 1996, and by paying attention to all political (presidential, congress, constituent assembly, local elections) and geographical (national, regional, local) levels, Mijeski and Beck show that the electoral achievements of the movement have been more limited than what some analysts stated. Although other authors have argued this before (see Zamosc 2007), Mijeski and Beck conduct a thorough and comprehensive analysis that further supports this assertion.

According to Mijeski and Beck, the results of the 1996 elections were excellent for a new political party. However, the authors show that electoral results had already dwindled 2 years after Pachakutik's creation. When Lucio Gutierrez was elected in 2002, many analysts as well as the general (urban middle class) public believed that the Colonel was chosen thanks to the support of the indigenous movement. However, Mijeski and Beck show that at the local level, where the alliance of Gutierrez and Pachakutik did not hold, many indigenous voters chose Gutierrez rather than Pachakutik. Furthermore, one of the findings of Mijeski and Beck is that Pachakutik was never able to attract the majority of the indigenous vote, a point that other authors have also stated (see Báez and Bretón 2006), but that Mijeski and Beck support with rigorous data and analysis. Mijeski and Beck show how, in its best moments, only around 30 per cent of indigenous voters chose Pachakutik candidates (59). Even though Pachakutik was an intercultural alliance, the authors demonstrate that it never consistently attracted nonindigenous and urban voters (117).

The limitation of many quantitative analyses is that they prove facts, but are not able to explain them. The balance between quantitative and qualitative data in Mijeski and Beck's book is able to overcome this problem. Quantitative analysis is combined with interviews with indigenous leaders and political analysts, which help contextualize the data. Mijeski and Beck blame some of the limitations of Pachakutik electoral politics on the political opportunism of leaders that were willing to make inadequate alliances in order to achieve immediate personal and political gains, a fact that was picked up by the indigenous public. The authors argue that another reason for the disjuncture between Pachakutik and indigenous voters is the separation between the national and the local leadership. According to the authors, local leaders frequently did not follow the directions of the national leadership and did not promote national candidates (111).

In-depth ethnographic analyses at the local level could offer additional nuances. Colloredo-Mansfeld (2009) has explored the strength and independence of local political dynamics that are not necessarily driven by the dictates of the national leadership. Indigenous scholar Tuaza Castro (2011) has explained tensions between leaders and bases that he calls 'organizational exhaustion,' meaning that the indigenous bases have become tired of working at the dictate of leaders without seeing clear results. Juliet Erazo (2013) describes the heterogeneity of indigenous projects at the local level and how the leader's project is only one among others. Such works highlight that indigenous leader's projects may become hegemonic on occasion, but not always.

The book by Marc Becker also employs interesting methodology that illuminates key issues on indigenous politics. Becker is an engaged scholar and activist who has been an advisor to CONAIE, particularly regarding technology. He also writes journalistic pieces in a useful newsletter geared toward activists and progressive readers called *Upside Down World* (<http://upsidedownworld.org>). Becker's engaged methodology is an asset because he has inside information that is often difficult for other scholars to access, and his incursion into journalism encourages him to be up to date with the latest political developments.

Furthermore, Becker is in contact with the Ecuadorian academia and closely follows this field. Another contribution of Becker is that he is aware of the historical depth of indigenous politics in a way that some political scientists are not. Finally, his earlier work on the interactions between the communist left and the indigenous movement (Becker 2008) helps Becker to more effectively contextualize the political culture of this social movement.

Becker conducts a nuanced discussion of indigenous movement claims during historical watersheds such as the Constituent Assembly of 2008. He contrasts the indigenous project for social justice with that of Alianza País (Country's Alliance, the political movement led by President Correa). The debates of the Constituent Assembly of 2008 and what was at stake there for indigenous peoples are beautifully summarized in Becker's work. Indigenous people sought agrarian reform and the redistribution of water, a halt on the extraction of natural resources, and plurinational recognition, among other demands. The government of President Correa was willing to provide limited redistribution and increased social investment. After a detailed analysis, Becker concludes that Correa, despite his socialist discourse, is more of a social reformist that would better be placed within the moderate left such as Brazil's former President Lula and Chile's President Bachelet (203). Here, however, activism may get in the way of analysis. Correa's project is very different from that of the moderate Latin American left. Whereas both Lula and Bachelet strengthened liberal institutions and civil rights, Correa has undermined the division of powers and has not been a champion of human rights (de la Torre and Arnson 2013; Martínez Novo 2014).

Becker recognizes class demands regarding access to land and natural resources as central to indigenous agendas, which is a more accurate perception than that of other authors who have mostly highlighted cultural issues. Interestingly, Becker argues that plurinationalism, the most 'ethnic' of indigenous demands, is actually a legacy of the concept of the oppressed nationalities of the communist left (13) and not a creation of ethnic groups, as other authors state (see Lucero 2008). Becker criticizes Federation of Evangelical Indigenous (FEINE) for being a conservative religious organization, whereas he characterizes CONAIE as a leftist classist group (17). However, Becker underemphasizes the importance of Catholic Liberation Theology in the creation of CONAIE (Martínez Novo 2009) as well as the more recent radicalization of FEINE (Andrade 2005).

Both Mijeski and Beck, and Becker evaluate and contrast what the indigenous movement has been able to achieve through social movement civil disobedience tactics and through electoral politics. Mijeski and Beck are pessimistic regarding the choice of an electoral strategy. They argue that civil disobedience tactics achieved a great deal: they were able to make nonindigenous Ecuadorians aware of indigenous people as political actors and led to the constitutional recognition of collective rights as well as the creation of a series of institutions for indigenous development and education. In contrast, electoral politics achieved little according to Mijeski and Beck. For instance, the authors argue that there were no concrete laws that could be named as an achievement of Pachakutik's congress people. Zamosc (2007) has explained further this lack of legislative achievement: Pachakutik, being a minority of around 10 to 7 per cent in Congress, was not able to get any of their legal initiatives approved. The only achievements that Beck and Mijeski recognize for the electoral strategy are those at the local level by some Pachakutik majors such as former Major Auki Tituaña of Cotacachi. However, the authors show how other local Pachakutik leaders made alliances with traditional politicians and could not be named for their contributions (68, 69). Whereas the political movement achieved little, it had many drawbacks. Specifically, indigenous politicians resorted to opaque party politics made unfortunate alliances and responded weakly to dominant power dynamics and personal interests. Becker agrees that the civil tactics of the social movement achieved more than the electoral strategy. However,

his point of view regarding these two paths to action is more ambiguous. He argues that social activists may need the electoral strategy to implement their social justice goals because they should not always be in the political opposition. However, Becker does not make clear what concrete social justice goals were achieved through embracing electoral politics in this particular case.

A criticism that could be leveled at the two books is that they differentiate too sharply between CONAIE and Pachakutik, while the individuals making up these two organizations tend to be the same and circulate from one organization to the other. The authors seem to want to 'save' the social movement while targeting the political party. This could be interpreted as a 'politics of anti-politics position.' Particularly, Mijeski and Beck seem to have a perception of politics as a corrupt field. As noted above, although Becker prefers the social to the political movement, he does not condemn the electoral strategy altogether. In any case, scholars must acknowledge that both CONAIE and Pachakutik have made unfortunate deals. For instance, the leadership of CONAIE participated in the 2000 unconstitutional removal from the office of President Mahuad.

Another issue on which I disagree with the two books is the characterization of Amazonian leaders as the 'villains' of this story, whereas highland leaders are characterized in a more positive light. For instance, Becker argues that CONAIE was created in the highlands while Pachakutik, a less successful organization, was created in the Amazon (44). This statement is incorrect, as the first indigenous organization to make up CONAIE was the Interprovincial Federation of Shuar Centers formed in 1964, long before the foundation of the highland branches of the indigenous movement in the early 1980s. Furthermore, the first president of CONAIE was Miguel Tankamash, a Shuar. Mijeski and Beck also tend to blame Amazon leaders for most problems. While there is certainly some accuracy to this, I believe that Amazon ethnic politics are more complex and highland ethnic politics and leaders have not always held high moral standards. The fact that the authors of both the books have been scholars centered in the highlands may have some impact in their understanding of Amazonian ethnic politics from a distance.

Regardless of some of their shortcomings, this review would like to highlight the important contributions of these two volumes that are a mandatory reading for students of indigenous social movements and their politics. The authors' sharp analysis, sound methodology, local knowledge, respect for national analysts and activists, awareness of the national context, and continued engagement with Latin America's changing political landscapes must be certainly praised.

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