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### **Review/Reseña**

A. Kim Clark and Marc Becker, eds. *Highland Indians and the State in Modern Ecuador*. (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2007).

## **Indigenous Politics and State Formation in Ecuador**

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Within Latin America, Ecuador gained notoriety in the 1990s for two aspects of its political system. First, at the beginning of the decade the national indigenous movement organized an uprising that surprised the nation by its scope and launched a decade of successful activism. Second, by the end of the decade the central government seemed to have become the least stable in the Americas, with a succession of presidents leaving office before the end of their term. In *Highland Indians and the State in*

*Modern Ecuador*, editors Kim Clark and Marc Becker have sought to uncover the long history of indigenous politics, not just to explain the political turbulence of the decade. They also show the ways the Ecuadorian state has made itself through its engagement with indigenous communities and the way the current movement is still redefining basic ideas of citizenship and nationality.

The editors bring together fourteen chapters from historians, political scientists, and anthropologists to focus on the details of state formation. In a wonderfully coherent and sustained way, the volume follows three interwoven themes: (1) the perennial efforts of national governments to centralize the state's authority, systemize administration of public works, and elevate a unified ideal of national identity; (2) the tactics of indigenous groups who exploit gaps and rivalries among levels of state power in order to end abusive labor practices, recover land, and widen their political rights; and (3) the remaking of ideals of citizenship and nation that has occurred due to the contest between Indians and the state. The authors enliven these issues with rich case materials. Among a variety of events and actions, the reader learns how prosecutors sought convictions in nineteenth century concubinage cases, finds out the circumstances in which daughters of an old land-owning family sold off their estate, and gets a glimpse of Rambo-inspired dreams of indigenous military conscripts who live on a base in the central Andes.

For all the detail, the volume is organized clearly and chronologically. After an introduction by Clark and Becker that sketches the geographical and sociopolitical context of native politics, the first four chapters examine how Ecuador's first leaders struggled to unify and modernize the republic. As Sattar points out in her chapter on early republican laws, one of the first major problems faced by the state was abolishing Indian tribute, the separate tax paid by indigenous communities. The autonomous civic-cultural status of Indians that enabled the assessment and collection of the tax also interfered with the core

nation-building task of forging a single national citizenry. Indeed, indigenous people recognized the importance of their special status in the tribute system and fought for its continuation despite the higher taxes the tribute forced them to pay. William's chapter on Otavalan Indians during the decades from 1851 to 1875 underscores how vulnerable native communities were to the ambitions of would-be nation builders at all levels. Much native politicking had to do with fending off abusive labor recruiters and tax assessors who sought resources for both public and private projects of local elite. And if the state moved toward abolishing a separate legal status for Indians, it was not prepared to grant full citizenship rights to them. O'Connor persuasively argues that native peoples were dismissed in part for their failure to adhere to certain gender ideologies. Indian men, in particular, were faulted for their failure to live up to the patriarchal ideal of masculine self-control in a public sphere.

The 1895 liberal revolution of Eloy Alfaro brought with it a new recognition of the rights of indigenous peoples and the failure of the young Ecuadorian nation to raise native people from the misery of their economic condition. Baud points out that in the Alfaro administration top politicians offered some of the most radical criticism of Indian exploitation. Consequently, Indians began to take petitions against abusive landlords directly to the president. The discursive terrain shifted. The need to liberate Indians from the hacendado's and priest's abuse became the new common-sense starting point for thinking about the "Indian problem." Ultimately, the failure of the liberal government to improve the circumstances in native communities led to protests and strikes in the 1920s. Anticipating the progressive nature of the 1990s activism, Baud observes "These were not 'Indian uprisings,' born out of primitivism and social and economic backwardness, as local politicians charged. It was the response to failed liberal reforms, the sabotage of the regional elite, and the incompetence of the state" (86).

The book's middle chapters offer a crucial new perspective on how the unrest of the twenties consolidated into the Indigenous consciousness

and organizations of the 1980s and 1990s. Clark examines the way Indians sustained pressure on landlords through their appeals to the central government. She emphasizes the strategy behind native leaders regard for national politicians: “When Indians offered deference to certain state officials, it was often as part of an explicit rejection of other officials” (89). In the 1940s, Indian politics began to formalize. They established the FEI (Ecuadorian Federation of Indians) and, working with the communist party, voiced their grievances in the 1944-1945 national Constituent Assembly. Becker carefully details the activism of communist leader Ricardo Paredes, who represented Indians at the Constituent Assembly. Showing how Paredes breaks from past paternalism, Becker argues that the labor leader upheld the radicalism of the Indians’ fight. Moving on to the 1950s, Waters then takes the story of indigenous struggle back to the country to chart the process of agrarian transformation. He emphasizes that the Indian community emerged as a potent new political actor. Getting readers to rethink the onset of contemporary activism, Waters details the breakdown of the hacienda economies and the emergence of peasant leadership in the years before the formal Agrarian Reform.

When the book turns to the contemporary movement, authors do a thoughtful job going beyond standard accounts of the 1990s. Pallares’s terrific chapter tracks the importance of the movement’s switch in focus to plurinationalism. Indians’ emphasis on their alternative nationalities grew when they saw how the state’s bilingual and cultural programs ignored the need for land, loans and other economic resources. In some of the richest ethnography in the book, Semelski traces the limits of indigenous cultural recognition in that core institution of the state, the armed services. But even among the military, indigenous claims of difference mattered. The traditional view of the twentieth century emphasized a single mestizo culture, or as one retired recruiter put it: “In the armed forces we only have citizens, we don’t have indios and non-indios” (158). By the end of the 1990s, though, military officers were willing to accept indigenous cultural

practices that were compatible with military norms and no longer overtly set out to make Indian soldiers into cultural mestizos. Erazo offers a chapter that contrasts the experience of Amazonian natives with Andean indigenous activists. Along the way she recovers the importance of “tame” Indians, those who were ostensibly more acculturated due to their settlement near missions. She demonstrates how members of these communities became a conduit for political activism.

Finally, the book finishes with three chapters that contrast Ecuador’s indigenous movement with organizing in Mexico, Bolivia and Peru. Mattiace evaluates the relative strength of Mexican and Ecuadorian state institutions, Lucero compares Bolivian political regionalism with the Ecuadorian experience, and Lucero and García raise a very important question when probing the ostensible lack of a national Peruvian indigenous movement: Just what constitutes success for Indian activism? They caution against using Ecuador’s recent history as the measure of other movements.

*Highland Indians and the State in Modern Ecuador* succeeds on many levels. The account of indigenous activism since the early days of the republic is comprehensive. Each chapter’s argument is tightly constructed and all work together to reinforce the importance of Indian political maneuvering for the formation of the Ecuadorian state. Any serious comparative inquiry into Latin America’s indigenous movements would be well served by this title. Ecuadorianist scholars concerned about politics, native peoples and the modern history of the nation will find this volume indispensable.