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Review / Reseña

Patricia Jaymie Heilman, *Before the Shining Path: Politics in Rural Ayacucho, 1895-1980*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010.

The Path Less Traveled: The Shining Path in Historical Perspective

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As the birthplace of the Shining Path guerrilla war, Ayacucho has experienced its share of political violence. Yet, as Jaymie Patricia Heilman demonstrates in *Before the Shining Path: Politics in Rural Ayacucho, 1895-1980*, the Peruvian highland department had been a hotbed of assassinations, kidnappings, and jailbreaks long before the Maoist rebels launched their insurgency in May of 1980. In the first in-depth study of twentieth-century Ayacucho, *Before the Shining Path* casts the guerrilla

insurgency as the most recent and radical manifestation of a much deeper historical struggle for indigenous peasant citizenship.

Combining detailed archival research and oral interviews, *Before the Shining Path* contributes to an impressive body of literature on peasant politics and indigenous-state relations in the Andes.¹ Whereas most of these studies have focused on questions of republican state formation, recent works have demonstrated that Andeans were just as politically active in the early twentieth century.² Heilman's study builds on this historiography, showing that rural Ayacuchans had been seeking meaningful dialogue with the Peruvian state well before the Shining Path insurgency. Focusing primarily on the district of Carhuanca and secondarily on Luricocha, Heilman argues that Ayacuchans' demands for increased political participation fell on deaf ears. Instead, the Peruvian state's policy toward Ayacucho ranged from brutal repression to what the author calls the "politics of abandon." As Heilman asserts, understanding this history of political repression and neglect is crucial to explaining the rise of the Shining Path.

Heilman traces the politics of abandon and repression all the way back to the turn of the century, the period known as the "Aristocratic Republic" (1895-1919). The first chapter discusses how governments at both the national and regional levels failed to address indigenous Ayacuchans' cries for citizenship in the wake of the War of the Pacific. This

¹ See, for example, Nelson Manrique, *Campesinado y Nación: Las guerrillas indígenas en la guerra con Chile* (Lima: Centro de Investigación y Capacitación, 1981); Florencia Mallon, *Peasant and Nation: The Making of Postcolonial Mexico and Peru* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995); Mark Thurner, *From Two Republics to One Divided: Contradictions of Postcolonial Nationmaking in Andean Peru* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997); Charles F. Walker, *Smoldering Ashes: Cuzco and the Creation of Republican Peru, 1780-1840* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999); Brooke Larson, *Trials of Nation Making: Liberalism, Race, and Ethnicity in the Andes, 1810-1910* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004). For an excellent study on 19th-century Ayacucho, see Cecilia Méndez, *The Plebeian Republic: The Huanta Rebellion and the Making of the Peruvian State, 1820-1850* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005).

² See, for example, María Elena García, *Making Indigenous Citizens: Identity, Development, and Multicultural Activism in Peru* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005); Gotkowitz, Laura. *A Revolution for Our Rights: Indigenous Struggles for Land and Justice in Bolivia, 1880-1052* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007); Marc Becker, *Indians and Leftists in the Making of Ecuador's Modern Indigenous Movements* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008).

state neglect had serious consequences at the district level. With virtually no state oversight in the countryside, local *gamonales*, authorities, and priests were free to abuse indigenous peasants—and each other—with impunity. In Carhuanca, peasants claimed their rights as Peruvian citizens to demand state protection against these abuses, but such protection never materialized. As a result, “Carhuanquinos’ local political world became defined by disorder and abuse” (26). And this was the best case scenario: In Luricocha, politically active peasants were met with violent repression at the hands of the state.

This did not keep Ayacuchan peasants from engaging in politics, however. In chapter two, Heilman offers a vivid portrait of the 1920s Tawantinsuyo Movement in Ayacucho. Typically associated with the Cuzco political scene, the Tawantinsuyo movement of Heilman’s study occupied a major space within Ayacucho society.³ Indigenous peasants in Carhuanca and other districts embraced Tawantinsuyo’s emphasis on indigenous citizenship, using the movement as a vehicle through which to reconstitute the district political structure. Rather than enter into dialogue with the Ayacuchans, however, the Leguía government sent in troops to crush the mobilization and eventually banned the Tawantinsuyo Movement altogether. In doing so, Heilman argues, the Peruvian state effectively “shut down a path toward meaningful equality and revolutionary change” (70).

The demise of the Tawantinsuyo Movement prompted Ayacuchan peasants to reclassify themselves along class, rather than racial, lines. The effects of indigenous peasants’ new political orientation came the following decade with the rise of Aprismo. Challenging conventional understandings about Alianza Popular Revolucionaria Americana (APRA) as the party of Peru’s northern coast, chapter three demonstrates that rural Ayacuchans from all walks of life actively embraced the radical political party as a means of combating their political abandon. As with the Tawantinsuyo Movement before it, though, APRA failed to alter the state’s neglect. Consequently, the same types of abuse that afflicted the department at the

³ See Marisol de la Cadena, *Indigenous Mestizos: The Politics of Race and Culture in Cuzco, Peru, 1919-1991* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000); María Elena García, *Making Indigenous Citizens: Identity, Development, and Multicultural Activism in Peru* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005).

turn of the century ran rampant during the middle of the century. In chapter four, the author introduces a cast of colorful characters who used their education and knowledge of the law to exploit the local populace. Still seeking a political allegiance that would lift them from their abandon and abuse, Ayacuchans during the 1950s and 1960s embraced everything from Trotskyism to Acción Popular, the party of presidential hopeful Fernando Belaúnde Terry. As Heilman argues in chapter five, it was the mid-level Carhuanquino notables who supported the radical politics of Trotskyism, Stalinism, and Maoism, driven by a desire to wrest power from abusive elites. Conversely, it was the district's peasant notables who supported Belaúnde, convinced that the presidential hopeful would make good on his campaign promises to recognize them as "citizens worthy of presidential attention and capable of contributing to the nation's progress" (147). Due in large part to the support of highland peasants, Belaúnde was elected president of the republic in 1962. Unfortunately, the political dialogue that his Ayacuchan supporters sought was not forthcoming.

When the left-of-center Juan Velasco Alvarado's Revolutionary Government of the Armed Forces (GRFA) seized power in 1968 vowing to reform the country's economic and political order, many Ayacuchans welcomed the change. And, as chapter six illustrates, many of these reforms did give peasants a sense of increased political participation, as indigenous peasants and mid-level notables made effective use of new state channels to denounce the abuses of local power holders. The problem, however, was that these reforms were short-lived. By the mid 1970s, the GRFA, now under conservative leadership, had rolled back many of these reforms to their pre-coup states. This abrupt termination of Velasco policy convinced many Ayacuchans that no government—whether civilian or military—would offer them the kind of political inclusion they so desperately craved. By the time the GRFA returned to the barracks and reinstated democratic governance in 1980, some Ayacuchans had already concluded that more radical measures were required for their political voice to be heard.

It is in this sense that the author renders the rise of the Shining Path comprehensible. Despite its violent opposition to the GRFA, the insurgency offered Ayacuchans "a bloody completion of the work the

Revolutionary Government had promised, but ultimately failed, to do” (161). The final chapter explores the rise of the Shining Path in late-1970s Ayacucho. Here, the author drives home her main argument that the politics of abandon facilitated the rise of the guerrilla group. This process was twofold. The first was ideological, as Ayacuchans rich and poor found resonance in the Shining Path’s message that the Peruvian state had neglected them. The second was operational, as the state withdrew police forces and ignored warnings from departmental authorities about the presence of radical elements in Ayacucho districts. Not surprisingly, it was often mid-level notables who joined the insurgency, still hoping to win the power struggle against abusive strongmen. Seen in this way, the Shining Path of Heilman’s study comes across as the most recent of a century-long political tradition in Ayacucho in which indigenous peasants and their allies sought to “fundamentally remake the Peruvian nation-state and transform political, economic, and social relations inside the country” (193).

The worst part about *Before the Shining Path* is that it eventually comes to an end. Heilman’s seamless, gripping historical narrative leaves the reader yearning to know more. How, for example, did local customs, practices, and cultural understandings contribute to the political violence? And what happened inside Ayacucho districts once the insurgency got underway? Did the political violence alter daily life, local structures, or state-peasant relations in a significant way? Heilman leaves the answers to these questions to other scholars, focusing instead on rural politics before the civil war.

It is in this sense that Heilman makes her most important contribution to the field. While others have speculated about the links between the pre-insurgency period and the political violence of the 1980s, Heilman has done the necessary legwork to draw out those connections. Moreover, in situating the insurgency within a longer struggle for indigenous peasant citizenship, *Before the Shining Path* serves as a useful caution against studies that portray Andeans as pre-political, inward-looking historical actors. As Heilman convincingly argues, Ayacuchan peasants were not only plugged into national politics, but in many cases they were the driving force behind those politics.

Before the Shining Path easily ranks among the top Andean studies monographs published this millennium. Meticulously researched and convincingly argued, Heilman's book offers an original portrait of pre-insurgency Ayacucho that specialists and non-specialists will appreciate. While books on the Shining Path abound, *Before the Shining Path* is the first to contextualize the Ayacuchan insurgency with concrete historical evidence. Anyone interested in understanding the historical conditions that facilitated the rise of the Shining Path should read this book.