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Review/Reseña

Brooke Larson, *Trials of Nation Making: Liberalism, Race, and Ethnicity in the Andes, 1810-1910* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

Republics Without Citizens: Indigenous Peoples

Confront the Nation and the State

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Brooke Larson's *Trials of Nation Making* is a vitally important book, which, if given the consideration it deserves, will force the rewriting of the master narrative of Latin American history. *Trials of Nation Making* follows the interaction of indigenous peoples with the new post-colonial states and nations in Bolivia, Peru, Ecuador and Colombia. Drawing on the rapidly expanding Andean nation and state formation literature, Larson has created

both a powerful synthesis of the existing literature and a series of cogent arguments about the nature of post-colonial nation-states in the first century after independence.

Before delving into the national case studies, Larson begins by elucidating two broad patterns of interaction between Indians and the state in the nineteenth century. From independence until the 1850s, the weakness of the new states and their desperation for revenue allowed many Indians to construct their own vision of republicanism which Larson calls “tributary citizenship” (211). Some indigenous groups accepted the re-imposition of tribute after its abolition following independence as a way to guarantee their corporate rights to communal land and self-government. Larson does not argue that Indians were unaware or automatically hostile to the new nation-states, but, rather, that instability and elite weakness allowed Indians space to create a new legal and discursive framework combining elements from the old colonial and new republican orders. This window of popular nation building was a short reprieve before the onset of liberalism in the 1850s. During that decade, export growth made Indian tributes less vital to the state, while increasing the value of indigenous land and labor. Elite liberals were faced with the contradiction of wanting to abolish Indians’ special rights while fearful of embracing universalism and therefore including Indians as full, equal citizens, especially daunting given Indians’ increasing claims on the nation. From the 1850s to 1910, most ruling elites solved this dilemma by rejecting universalism; championing instead a vicious racial hierarchy and internal colonialism in order to exclude those they saw as unfit for national inclusion. Popular notions of republicanism would fade, replaced by metropolitan ideas of liberalism, race, and civilization. While following her overarching patterns throughout the case studies, Larson, at the same time, carefully charts the differences and divergences in the indigenous experience in the Andes. This

sophisticated blending of the general and the particular is the first great strength of the work. Since Larson always traces the contingency of political, economic and social forces on the ground, the work never seems a cold project of model building, but, rather, is a humanistic synthesis.

The second and third great strengths of Larson's analysis revolve around the ways she balances competing schools of historical thought. Instead of asserting that little changed with independence or that the new nation-states changed everything, she combines the *longue durée* of colonial persistence, economic structures, and cultural survivals with the constantly changing political realities of nation formation. Equally important, her presentation of Indians' agency within these larger structures helps move the debate beyond the now tired categories of accommodation and resistance. I will return to this point shortly, but Larson's approach to these problems poses a potent challenge to the standing master narrative of nineteenth-century Latin America.

Finally, *Trials of Nation Making* powerfully argues how devastating the crucible of liberalism and modernity was for the new nations and their indigenous peoples. Liberalism and the elite vision of modernity attacked Indians' communal landholding and interrogated their "political rights, social memory, location, and identity" in the new nation-states (7). As Paul Gilroy did in *The Black Atlantic* for people of African descent, Larson excavates the reality of the project of modernity for Indians, who, she notes, created their own "ambivalent modernities" (248). In Ecuador, she traces how Indians were forced through labor drafts to build the nation's infrastructure—Indians brought physical modernity, but were excluded from it politically and socially. Larson suggests that the coercion and exclusion of Indians was not the result of the failure of modernity to penetrate into the Andes, but the consequence and handmaiden of modernity.

Mostly, it seems Andean states failed to establish a common framework of liberalism and nationalism. By the late twentieth century, no hegemonic language of contention existed to replace the old colonial dual republics discourse. In Bolivia, Indians were excluded from the political sphere as elites constructed an “apartheid”-like system to remove them from land and turn them into disciplined workers (243). The main legacy of nineteenth-century nation making seems to have been one of failure. Larson is brilliant in evoking the crucible of nation making, especially in relation to liberalism and modernity, for Indian communities. However, if I can offer a slight suggestion: that the new nations were crucibles for everyone. Elites were not often comfortable in the new nations either. The nation, so new and undefined, presented challenges for all. Subalterns of all stripes, in all places, I would like to suggest, took up the challenge of the nation and tried their best to make it their own, but with varying degrees of success due to their own strategies and the local conditions they faced. I think this is best represented by the story of Afro-Latin Americans, a counter-point to Larson’s indigenous-centered narrative.

Larson notes the Afro-Latin American situation was different than Indians’ position, as they could not call on colonial rights. Yet what did this mean for nation making? If the Afro-Latin American experience was different—and I believe it was by and large—why were Afro-Latin Americans more successful in places like Colombia (where they were a minority) and Cuba (close to, if not, a majority) in inserting themselves in the nation than the indigenous peoples of the Andes? In both places Afro-Latin Americans won the abolition of slavery, the end of caste segregation, important roles in the military, and unrestricted adult male suffrage.

This is especially striking if we think of how repressive states and national imaginaries would become for Afro-Latin Americans in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century (Cuba being

somewhat the exception). Larson cites Peter Wade's notion that Blacks had no positive colonial legacy to draw on. While this seems to be a disadvantage, as they could not call on ancient rights and privileges, it also left them more free (or with no other choice) than to embrace republicanism and popular liberalism and make them their own. Indians had the advantage of their older institutionalized space, so their use of republicanism and popular liberalism would not be the same.

Yet use it they would. *Trials of Nation Making* notes how different Colombia was from Ecuador, Peru, and Bolivia, but I would argue it was more distinct. While Larson traces how Indians often used elite projects for their own purposes, and especially early in the century, invented languages of counter republicanism, in Colombia Indians forged a language of popular indigenous republicanism with which elites had to negotiate well into the late nineteenth century. In southern Colombia, Indians from the 1850s onward, in a negotiation and appropriation of republicanism, pushed their own agenda against Colombia's political parties and the state. As elsewhere, Liberals tried to push anti-corporate legislation, with the result being that Colombia's Indians supported Conservatives in the civil war of 1854 and electorally afterwards. Liberals, facing another civil war in 1859, had to pass a law ending the assault on corporate landholding and recognizing indigenous community governance in order to ensure Indians would not join with Conservative armies again. Indians forced elites to, albeit grudgingly, recognize them as citizens and Indians—not just in the celebrated cases of Manuel Quintín Lame or the 1991 Colombian Constitution in the twentieth century, but in the nineteenth. As the century wore on, Colombia became more like the rest of the Andes politically—which Larson describes—as popular rights and citizenship were restricted during the Regeneration in the 1880s. As subalterns became too important in war—and demanded too much for their service—elites abandoned

both republican democracy, as in Colombia, and nationalist mobilization in Peru. Yet while Larson shows how Peruvian elites could not tolerate subaltern patriotic soldiers (and their demands) even for a few years, Colombian Liberals and eventually even Conservatives negotiated and bargained with indigenous soldiers and voters for over three decades.

I bring up the Colombian and Afro-Latin American cases to suggest that we be careful not to fall into what I call “the teleology of Subaltern Studies and post-colonial literature”—the idea that the nation was destined to fail. As Larson shows for Bolivia, even in the most hostile environments of exclusion and racism, Indians sought to appropriate the new nation in some way. The nation was very undefined in the nineteenth century, unlike the case for twentieth-century post-colonization in Africa and Asia, and wherever historians have looked, they have found subalterns claiming and appropriating the nation, often successfully. Larson persuasively and passionately argues that “liberal-positivist” reforms destroyed these subaltern national constructs in the late nineteenth century (248). Indians lost not only their corporate rights and land, but also the place they had constructed for themselves in the early republics. To justify their visions of liberalism and modernity, elite state-makers transformed the identity of Indian from designating a corporate group to signifying an inferior race. By the end of the century, elites hoped they had solved the problem of their indigenous peoples and republicanism by creating “republics without citizens” (247). In the new research into the real, lived experience of the nineteenth century that Larson calls for—while recognizing the destruction of popular republicanism at the end of the century—we must not efface subalterns’ often successful efforts at seizing the nation. As Larson notes, these efforts would re-emerge continuously in twentieth-century social movements, as indigenous activists reasserted their right to call upon the nation as “Indians.” If I have overly stressed

how outside the core of the Andes subalterns seemed to have had much more success in appropriating the nation and even liberalism, it is because I see *Trials of Nation Making* as being so important for rewriting the master narrative of Latin American History in interesting and necessary ways.

I suspect Professor Larson would protest that she had no intent to rewrite the master narrative, but, thankfully, that is what she has done. While I think she might question the whole idea of a master narrative, Larson's work is an example of what we must do if any of the multitudinous local and national histories of the nineteenth century can have a broader meaning. Most syntheses of Latin America's nineteenth-century are primarily economic. For scholars as politically and ideologically diverse as Stanley Stein and Barbara Stein, Tulio Halperín Donghi, and David Bushnell and Neill Macaulay, an economic motor drives history. These narratives offer politics and culture much less of a role in shaping history and they offer lower-class people almost no role, save as problems to be removed, victims of capitalism's advance, or, in the case of Bradford Burns, brave rebels against modernity. Claudio Véliz's more cultural look at centralism equally denies any agency to the lower classes. *Trials of Nation Making* brings two new literatures into this master narrative: a critique of modernity in Atlantic History and the burgeoning Latin American nation and state formation corpus. Larson never ignores the power of economic forces, which so much of the nation and state formation literature slights (I probably should include myself here), but her vision is expansive enough to allow agency, both from above and below, in shaping history. Indians return to the narrative, not just as victims or doomed heroes, but as real historical actors who shape the story. After Larson, the history of the nineteenth century can no longer *only* be a story of states' success or failure at creating export economies (for good or ill depending on the ideological cast of the author), but must also take

into account the agency, often expressed via a discursive and active grappling with the new state and nation, of subalterns.

Trials of Nation Making is an important step in rewriting the master narrative. If we continue in its vein, and I believe we must, we must also suggest not just how the nineteenth-century experience of various nations differed, and Larson does this so well, but also if and how that difference affected the historical trajectories of each state. I think Bolivia and Colombia are illustrative here: are their differences just the result of divergent economic paths (as suggested in the old narrative) or are the histories of nineteenth-century subaltern political action important to each nation's twentieth-century conditions? Subalterns in Colombia were much more able to reframe the nation as their own, even if they were eventually severely repressed under the Regeneration after 1886. In Bolivia, as Larson shows, elites only hesitatingly allowed this political space, which they quickly crushed. I think the challenge now for historians is to ask how we can more fully incorporate nineteenth-century social movements into history, not just as a moment of social history or a glorious resistance that is defeated, but as a historical force. *Trials of Nation Making* pushes us powerfully in that direction.