



Vol. 8, No. 1, Fall 2010, 540-550
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Review/Reseña

Martin Edwin Andersen, *Peoples of the Earth: Ethnonationalism, Democracy, and the Indigenous Challenge in "Latin" America*. Lanham, Md.: Lexington Books, 2010.

Indigenous Dangers in the Americas: "Potential, Real, and Imagined"

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There is much to say about Martin Edwin Andersen's ambitious but problematic book on indigenous politics in Latin America. However, before discussing its merits and weaknesses, I would like to consider for a moment the book's intellectual packaging. While we are told not to judge a book by its cover, I would hazard the suggestion that one can learn something about a book by examining two artifacts that bracket its pages: the foreword that a distinguished scholar lends to the start of another scholar's book, and the praise of the work provided by other luminaries on a book's back cover. As

the marketing catnip that publishers like to provide potential customers, these built-in expert evaluations not only entice readers to explore the pages in between, but they also suggest something about the work's aims and target audiences. The foreword for Andersen's book on the "indigenous challenge in 'Latin' America," is penned by political scientist Robert A. Pastor, who served on the National Security Council (for President Carter) and has authored many influential works on US-Latin American relations. Pastor begins his foreword by reminding readers of one of the strange coincidences of September 11, 2001: leaders of the governments of the Organization of American States signed a historic pact to protect democracy in the region, the Inter-American Democratic Charter, just moments after the "United States was attacked by a small group of Islamic nihilists" (xiii). Pastor goes on to summarize Andersen's concern with indigenous self-determination as well as the author's worry about potential threats to democracy and the danger of (in Andersen's words) "vengeance between races and cultures" not only within Latin America, but also from outside actors looking to take advantage of challenges to US hegemony. The stage is set, then, for an account of opportunity and danger as indigenous people walk the knife's edge of September 11, between democratic promise and radical violence.

Flipping to the back cover, one finds shorter but no less enthusiastic endorsements from several influential scholars, including ethno-nationalist expert Walker Connor. Professor Connor lets readers know that while "[p]olitical mobilization of indigenes of the Andean Cordillera from Mexico (sic) to Bolivia has belatedly forced their governments and the outside world to acknowledge them as a consequential force..., comparative analysis of these movements and their likely outcomes is needed." The need for Andersen's book is urgent, Connor explains, as "scholars in the field of comparative ethnic nationalism have long been frustrated by the nearly total absence [!] of information concerning the indigenous people of Latin America." Most readers of this journal as well as Latin Americanists familiar with the explosion of scholarly production on indigenous politics across the Americas (or anyone who conducts a Google search with the terms "indigenous movements Latin America") will note that such a

statement is factually incorrect. However, the broad point that both of these scholarly endorsements suggest is the following: this book is not for scholars of indigenous politics, but for those outside the field wanting to know whether indigenous politics will enhance or threaten democracy and security in the region.

Though Andersen covers a significant amount of ground geographically (writing on indigenous struggles from the Arctic to Patagonia) and bibliographically (summarizing key findings of many scholars), as a guide for those not familiar with the topic and the region, this book reveals important limitations as it moves from (1) a theoretical argument about the connections between indigenous politics, democracy, and security to (2) case studies of six countries to (3) a set of conclusions and recommendations. I examine each of these three major sections of the book in turn.

Indigenous Activism, Democracy, and Ungoverned Spaces

It is important to underline that Andersen sees himself as an advocate of indigenous people and their struggles for self-determination. The first few chapters of the book make clear that indigenous people have been excluded by the political projects of elites throughout the hemisphere and that their claims for recognition and collective rights are legitimate and important ones. Echoing many recent works, Andersen suggests that the most recent round of indigenous mobilization is nothing less than the “final frontier... of global decolonization” (3). Andersen correctly suggests that indigenous demands for justice are genuine, indigenous suffering is real, and the agenda of indigenous rights is urgent. What Andersen adds to these familiar claims is a more alarming message to readers about the possible dangers that accompany indigenous movements, dangers that are framed in the language of ethno-nationalism, failed states, and potential radicalization and manipulation by outside forces.

This work is solidly situated within the literature on nationalism. Andersen is clear that the rising wave of indigenous movements carries risks that are familiar to all students of nationalism. In a characteristic passage, Andersen suggests that traumatic experiences with nationalism in

other parts of the world can help us understand its dangers in Latin America:

At the time this monograph was begun, 2008, when the independence of Kosovo occupied the front pages of the world's newspapers, a focus on the nationalist experiences in other regions began to offer a useful—although certainly not a defining—comparison with the rise of native peoples' nationalism in the Americas...

Reflecting chasms of culture and disputed ideas over state and ethnic group boundaries...indigenous demands also bring with them the potential for ethnic conflict of four types categorized by political scientists. The communal conflicts in 'Latin' America range—as either potential or real, inchoate or full blown—from *ethnic violence* (two or more groups involved in aggressive acts against each other) and *rebellion* (where one group revolts against another to wrest control of the political system), to *irredentism* (the efforts by an ethnic group to secede from one state to join ethnic members in another state) and *civil war* (where one group seeks to create new political systems based on ethnicity) (emphasis in original, 11-12).

This passage places this study of indigenous movements within the study of “potential or real, inchoate or full blown” ethnic conflicts, the kind that tore apart the Balkans. This is, of course, not a new claim, as it is one of the more common criticisms that ruling elites and military officials made during the wave of indigenous mobilizations in the 1990s. The problem with this framing is that (with very few exceptions) indigenous movements across the region have mobilized peacefully, within the norms of democratic civil society, and without irredentist ambitions. If one consults the various comparative works on indigenous politics in the Americas published in the last two decades, it should become clear that indigenous demands have been largely about addressing the economic harm to popular sectors by neoliberal policies, seeking political reforms to accommodate differentiated notions of political and cultural citizenship, and finding ways to reconcile multiple memberships in various “national” (Quechua, Aymara etc.) communities with the architectures of single states.¹

¹ Curiously, Andersen's references suggest that he *has* consulted several important volumes that make precisely these points. In addition, however, there are several more volumes that also make these points and that did *not* make it to his bibliography. Among the key volumes that are missing from Andersen's discussion are Warren and Jackson eds. (2003), Dean and Levi eds. (2003),

Andersen, however, insists that the “effects of unrest, potential, real, and imagined” (16) can be seen across the Americas, from Canada to Chile. While Andersen does not see indigenous people themselves as a threat, his argument is that other actors—either irresponsible populists or radical extremists—will use legitimate indigenous issues for illegitimate projects that will weaken the rule of law and/or threaten the hemisphere’s security.

The author supports his case principally through the use of two less than persuasive kinds of arguments. First, he employs what might be called the “where-there-is-smoke-there-is-fire” argument in which Andersen will cite extreme voices of alarm, critics with whom Andersen does not necessarily side, but who nonetheless index the tensions that have arisen in response to indigenous movements. Here is a representative passage:

Possibly apocalyptic scenarios are not only the elucubrations (sic) of Brazilian generals, Argentine landowners, or non-Indian elites in Perú or Bolivia, either. They have also emerged in Canada... Douglas L. Bland, Chair of Defence Studies at the School of Public Policy Studies at Queen’s University in Kingston, Canada sought to rock his country’s consciousness with the publication of a novel, *Uprising*, about a future Indian rebellion there. (16)

Andersen notes that Bland’s publishing house advertised the novel as not only a work of fiction, but also as a work classifiable under “aboriginal affairs.” He shares one particular promotional passage describing Bland’s cautionary tale: “A root cause of terrorism in far-away countries, Canadians are told, is poor desperate young people who turn their frustrations and anger on their ‘rich oppressors.’ *Uprising* brings this scenario home to Canada.” Bland’s passage, reproduced at length by Andersen, proceeds with a fictional scenario in which aboriginal terrorists attack Canada’s natural gas and oil sources sending the country into chaos and inviting conflict with the U.S. This of course has not happened, but in a book about threats “potential, real, and imagined” that seems almost beside the point. The relevant point: *It could happen!*

A second related strategy bears a very close resemblance to a position associated with former U.S. Vice President Dick Cheney: the “one percent” argument. Roughly, the idea here is that we don’t need to know

Postero and Zamosc eds. (2004), and De la Cadena and Starn (2007). The case study chapters also reveal important bibliographic silences.

how likely an event actually is, we only need know that the outcome is so bad that simply a one percent possibility of it coming to pass is reason enough for us to treat it as an actual threat. It is perhaps not surprising that the threat here (as in the Vice President's mind) is Islamist radicalism. Pointing to the emergence of a relatively small number of Islamic converts in Chiapas, Andersen sees the danger of Islam radicalism in Zapatista territory. "It is an open question whether some Chiapas (sic) and other Indians may seek alternative means of violent protest, ones that might parallel their disenchantment with Christianity and a subsequent embrace of militant Islam" (78). What evidence is there for such a claim? Andersen cites an article produced for the *Jamestown Terrorism Monitor* that suggests that Sufi Murabitun Muslims sought to contact Subcomandante Marcos. Curiously, Andersen does not report that these efforts were unsuccessful nor does he cite the conclusion of the same *Jamestown Terrorism Monitor* article that "any potential inroads by al-Qaeda into Mexico is not likely to come through ties with Mexico's Muslim community—and this includes local converts or otherwise" (Zambelis 2006). The more pressing security concerns, the report suggests, are related to increasing drug violence (fueled by US and Canadian consumption, I might add) and weak political institutions, not indigenous people. That his source does not worry about radical Islamism blossoming in Mexico does not seem to trouble Andersen, though. The point remains: *It could happen!*

Consulting Andersen's other sources, one finds remarkably little evidence of any primary research, odd for a book that seeks to be an academic contribution. This is not to say that scholarly work cannot be done with a heavy reliance on secondary work, but if someone argues that "ungoverned spaces" and "radical Islam" are threats in Latin America, wouldn't one expect that researcher to go to Latin America and speak with Latin Americans? The only indication of Andersen's work in the region is provided by the "About the Author" section where readers are informed that he has a "long history working with, advocating the rights of, and reporting on Native Americans" in the US, Mexico, Central America, and South America (295). Yet, in this book there is not a single interview with

any indigenous person from any country in the region. Indeed there are remarkably few interviews with any Latin Americans. By my count, Andersen cites only two conversations with Latin Americans, one with Peruvian “defense and security expert” Luis Giacoma Machiavello and another with Ecuadorian Defense Minister Wellington Sandoval. Though this methodological language is perhaps out of place here, with such a sample of voices, the danger of “selection bias” is more real than imagined.

Case Studies: Bolivia, Peru, Ecuador, Guatemala, Chile, Colombia

Following the theoretical argument, Andersen devotes the following six chapters to six different countries. These chapters provide uneven and often ambivalent support for the claims outlined in the first part of the book. The lengthiest chapter is devoted to Bolivia, a case that represents the danger of a populist indigenous president using his own popularity to crowd out other indigenous voices and increase his own power. In the words of former President Carlos Mesa (who was ousted by popular mobilizations associated with Evo Morales and other indigenous leaders), “Evo Morales is destroying the rule of law” (114). Andersen is certainly correct, and hardly alone, in pointing to tensions in Bolivia generally and within the indigenous movement specifically. Nonetheless, he cites George Gray Molina’s observation that political violence has been relatively rare in Bolivia’s past and it is unlikely in the future (109). Still, the rhetoric of anti-Evo opposition figures, who frequently invoke the examples of Nazi Germany and the Balkans to describe Bolivia under Morales, suggests that violence remains a distinct possibility. One may wonder, though, if the danger lies in the hyperbolic and extreme positions of the political right, why would Evo Morales be blamed as the culprit for eroding the rule of law? I do not suggest that Bolivia has become a democratic paradise, nor do I dismiss the shortcomings of the Morales presidency. Rather, I argue that the complexities of the current moment merit a more sustained and nuanced historical discussion than the one offered here, one that considers, for example: the poor record of Bolivian democracy *before* Morales’ election, the new opportunities offered by an improving economic picture (which unlike under previous governments includes a budget *surplus*), and

the most inclusionary constitutional reform process the country has ever seen.

The chapter devoted to Peru serves to highlight some of the dangers of indigenous experiences with leftist insurgencies, nationalist populists, and the return of President Alan García. While there is much in this chapter that does capture the ambivalent state of indigenous politics in Peru and the tragic events of the García government's efforts to open the Amazon to extractive industry and violently suppress indigenous protests there, there are also some questionable claims. The notion that Sendero Luminoso should be considered an Andean indigenous movement (quoted on p. 116) is a misreading of the historical and anthropological record. Andersen, to his credit, does note later that indigenous peoples were among the greatest victims of Senderista violence. More seriously, though, the suggestion that Sendero Luminoso and the Zapatistas are in any way comparable—Andersen says they are both cases of non-indigenous people speaking and acting in the name of indigenous people—is misleading at best and dangerously irresponsible at worst. The chapter also contains a thin discussion of recent events. For instance, the discussion of the nationalist mestizo leader and presidential candidate, Ollanta Humala, never examines a direct statement made by this controversial leader (the chapter relies on editorials from Peru and Argentina, which often say more about the ideologies of the editorialists than about Humala). Humala is certainly, in my view, a problematic figure, but the analysis here is fast and loose. The chapter also includes some careless errors, such as getting wrong the name of the main Amazonian leader during the 2009 conflict in Bagua (it is Alberto, not Luis, Pizango) (126). There are other similarly unfortunate lapses in empirical or editorial care in other chapters, such as getting wrong the name of the two largest indigenous groups in Ecuador, the Kichwa and Shuar (not the “Kichuaicha” of p. 136 or the “Shaur” of p. 175). The cumulative effect of these dubious claims and small errors is to fuel skepticism about the empirical foundation of this investigation as a whole.

The chapters that follow do little to restore a skeptical reader's confidence. These chapters are less detailed than the chapters on Bolivia and Peru. Indeed, the chapters on Ecuador (at 8 pages), Guatemala (5

pages) and Colombia (6 pages) are so short that one wonders why they were included at all. Each does have a take away message that resonates with the findings of other scholars: Ecuador shows how indigenous political gains can be undone by tactical political mistakes, the Guatemalan chapter shows that a history of violence has complicated political efforts to recognize the country's pluri-national character, and Colombia shows the remarkable gains of a relatively small indigenous population. Yet, all these claims are much better examined elsewhere in other works. The case study on Chile is more substantial (at 12 pages) and produces perhaps the most sympathetic analysis in the book of indigenous (Mapuche, in this case) struggles against an increasingly repressive state. Yet, once one finishes reading these case studies, it is not clear how or why these cases were selected or how they advance the arguments made in the first part of the book. In some ways, though, they do set the stage for the last part of the book, which provides a set of broader recommendations and conclusions.

The Big Picture

Andersen concludes his book with two chapters that provide some final policy and conceptual lessons from the experiences of indigenous struggles in the Americas. Some of Andersen's recommendations are quite sensible and, by the lights of the existing scholarship, non-controversial, like the call for a greater recognition of the place of indigenous peoples in democratic politics and the case for taking seriously (and thinking critically about) demands for collective rights. Other claims are more questionable like the idea that Canadian or US policies for indigenous sovereignty and justice could serve as models for Latin American states. Especially suspicious is the argument that US models of recognition or adjudication of indigenous conflicts offer exportable kinds of best-practices. This is an idea that, to my knowledge, has never been made by any US or Latin American indigenous leader or advocate. Indeed, there are strong feelings in the opposite direction. Even strong cases of tribal sovereignty like that of the Choctaw nation in the US, whose claims have been upheld by Supreme Court decisions and federal policies, provide little support for seeing the US as a model. Choctaw scholar Valerie Lambert suggests that even the legal

victories of her people have been precarious and fraught with colonial contradictions. Indeed, Lambert concludes that those looking for indigenous models of sovereignty should look outside the United States (Lambert 2007: 169).

The last chapter returns to the ambivalence of the opening sections. Indigenous people have contributed to Latin American democracy, but the “worst case scenario” of “Indian ultranationalism” still looms on the horizon. “Native American experience may thus resemble in unexpected and undesired ways the fate of Kosovo, Kenya, China and other countries wracked outside the region by ethnic strife” (196). The final lines of the book are pessimistic ones, telling readers what lies ahead if political leaders do not follow the advice provided in its pages. “In that case, the outcome is likely to be a cycle of vengeance and violence between races and cultures...” (198). Thus, we are left with the following lesson: if modest, North American-style recognition of indigenous peoples does not come to the South, we should all be on the look-out for trouble from dangerous populists (like Evo Morales in Bolivia) or radical influences (like radical Islamists in Chiapas). With more empirical evidence and a more compelling theoretical framework, this might have been a warning that security specialists should heed. Yet, in the absence of such support, this book remains a horror story of ethno-nationalism that reveals the insecurities and imaginings of the non-indigenous North more than the realities and complexities of the indigenous South.

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