
RESEÑAS DE LIBROS / BOOK REVIEWS

RODDY BRETT: *Social Movements, Indigenous Politics and Democratization in Guatemala, 1985-1996*. Boston: Brill, 2008.

Recent events in Guatemala – selective repression of indigenous activists, human rights violations, and the acceleration of everyday violence – attest to the truism of an old saying: “The past is still with us; in fact, it isn’t even passed.” To be sure, the intensity and scale of political violence has been reduced dramatically since the signing of the peace accords that ended one of the most brutal and seemingly intractable wars in the western hemisphere in the twentieth century. But, as Brett aptly notes in the conclusion of his book on social movements during Guatemala’s democratization period, the structural foundations of inequality and racism upon which many contemporary forms of violence and repression are built, tragically remain. It is for this reason that this book is important not just as an analysis of a particular period in history, but also as a source of insight into the strategies and repertoires, the context and outcomes of the social movements that are demanding political inclusion and human rights in contemporary Guatemala.

The research question that Brett presents at the outset focuses on the ‘hows’ and ‘whys’ of collective action during Guatemala’s democratic transition. He wants to better understand how and why social movement groups emerged to demand recognition of both their specific identities and their influence in the political process. He is particularly interested in the interaction between movement identities, discourse, and strategies on one side, and the changing national and international opportunity structures, on the other. Brett’s study highlights the period from 1985 – when the so-called democratic transition began with the crafting of a new constitution and the first elections in a long time – to 1996 – when the final peace accord was signed and Guatemala’s internal conflict was finally concluded. To understand the role of popular movements more specifically – or the role of civil society more broadly – Brett provides in-depth case studies of three central movements: The Council of Ethnic Communities (CERJ), The National Indigenous and Peasant Coordination (CONIC), and Defensoria Maya.

Brett explores the emergence, transformation, and influence of CERJ as one of the most important human rights organizations in Guatemala and as the “early riser” in a key protest cycle. Originally, CERJ focused on issues such

as ending the hated civil defense patrols (PACs) – the paramilitary groups that were responsible for many massacres of entire indigenous communities – and terminating forced recruitment into the military. As the organization became more professional, it hired lawyers who represented poor and/or indigenous claims against the state regarding such violations as extrajudicial executions, forced disappearances, death threats, and rape. Finally, as the peace process progressed and as elections became more inclusive with the emergence of parties more representative of popular sentiment, CERJ focused on influencing the peace process and fielding electoral candidates. As Brett demonstrates, each strategy change was partially a response to the needs and perceptions of the organization's leadership and members, and partially a response to changing opportunities in the political environment.

While CERJ focused on what are often considered fundamental human rights – the right to life, free movement, association, and speech – CONIC highlighted people's right to property. In the context of Guatemala – whose land tenure is the most unequal in Latin America and whose land issues are at the root of much of the country's violent past and present – fighting for access to land was a profoundly dangerous and ambitious undertaking. CONIC combined both institutional and extra-institutional strategies to demand land, including marches, land occupations, and petitions to secure land purchases through state-designated agencies. While CONIC maintained its autonomy from the political sector and the peace process negotiations, the larger political environment influenced it in an important way. Over time, CONIC began to leverage its claims as part of a larger campaign for indigenous rights, specifically Mayan rights. CONIC's slogan, "If we rescue our land, we rescue our culture," hints at the central importance Mayan groups place on land ownership and cultivation. As Brett states in a footnote, this land rescue was not inconsequential, as CONIC gained 28.5 caballerías of land (1 caballería = 101.4 acres) between 1995 and 1996 alone. While (or perhaps because) it decided to prioritize autonomy over collaboration and inclusion in institutionalized politics, CONIC contributed to the significant increase in the material gains of the indigenous people, and at the same time helped to reinforce the notion that indigenous rights should increase throughout the continent.

Finally, Defensoría Maya was the most self-consciously Mayanist organization from the outset. Its main goal was to promote Mayan customs and laws in the context of a larger campaign to resurrect indigenous culture in Guatemala. Defensoría Maya legally represented indigenous people before the law in their own language and whenever possible advocated for the resolution of conflicts through parallel structures of community leadership. With more opportunities to work beyond community legal structures, Defensoría Maya's influence grew

stronger. The organization began to directly engage with elite structures of the state and to have a presence – even if only consultative – in the peace accord negotiations and to run candidates for local and national elections.

While the effects of these movements and their strategies are not unitary, a number of common findings emerge from this study. First, we see that – as in other Latin American social movements – class-based grievances gave way to identity claims, in this case indigenous identity. Similarly, we see that these groups began working within a broad human rights frame, which became solidified as an indigenous rights frame later in the trajectories of these movements. These convergences are partially due to the influence of national and international events, such as *Los Quinientos Años de Resistencia* (The 500 Years of Resistance) campaign, the end of the Cold War, and the award of the Nobel Peace Prize to Guatemalan indigenous rights activist Rigoberta Menchú. Together, these events signaled that class claims were old news and that indigenous rights claims were new. In a similar vein, Brett shows how each of these organizations responded to and worked with changing domestic conditions, whether it was the 1985 democratic opening, the various peace accords on indigenous rights, land tenure, civil society, and the role of the military, or the broadening of political choices within the electoral spectrum. A crucial question around this final theme is how much movements gain in representation and influence when they begin to embrace institutional strategies and how much autonomy they lose.

While the level of scholarship of this book is impressive – and the conclusions interesting – I wonder how it might have differed if Brett had included one of Guatemala's many important women's organizations in his study. He often mentions the Mutual Assistance Group (GAM) and the National Coordination of Guatemalan Widows (CONAVIGUA), but does not adequately defend his position to exclude them from his study. These were important, early, and enduring movements that similarly moved the popular sector from the protest stage to the proposal stage of collective action. But perhaps because they did not wholly adopt the indigenous rights frame, they were not included in this analysis. A fuller understanding of the interaction between Guatemalan social movements and democratization would have included at least one of these important movements.

This book will be of interest to people already well versed in Guatemalan history and politics. As someone who lived in Guatemala during much of the period of Brett's study, the detail and accuracy of his writing almost literally transported me back to Guatemala. But therein lies its greatest weakness. For the uninitiated, this book will be difficult to follow. It jumps directly into complicated histories of movements, often uses terms in Spanish without translating them, and does not give the reader a mental road map of civil society to guide the reading

of this very specific analysis of Guatemalan social movements. However, it will be a valuable resource to advanced scholars of Guatemalan politics and society.

Julie Stewart

University of Utah

DONNA J. GUY: *Women Build the Welfare State: Performing Charity and Creating Rights in Argentina, 1880-1955*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2009.

Women Build the Welfare State es la obra más reciente de la reconocida historiadora Donna J. Guy. Aquí se propone explorar y corregir el mito de que el estado benefactor argentino fue construido por Juan D. Perón y su esposa Eva Perón a partir de 1945. El subtítulo parece indicar que la obra se limita a estudiar el período desde 1880 hasta 1955. Sin embargo, este es un proyecto mucho más ambicioso. Guy explora los orígenes de las políticas sociales del estado argentino durante el primer gobierno nacional en la década de 1820, y se proyecta hasta el presente preguntándonos qué le ocurrirá al estado benefactor bajo el impacto de las reformas neoliberales de las últimas décadas. Guy se propone identificar las continuidades históricas de las políticas sociales desde el gobierno de Bernardino Rivadavia hasta el de Juan D. Perón. Su demostración de que las políticas sociales peronistas utilizaron la estructura establecida por los gobiernos anteriores, incluyendo las administraciones liberales, sería suficiente para reconocer a esta obra como una contribución novedosa y valiosa. Sin embargo, la contribución más notable es la desmitificación del rol de Eva Perón en las políticas sociales del gobierno peronista.

La ilustración de tapa enmarca claramente la obra: la imagen dominante es la estatua de una leona con alas (la mitológica Esfinge) con el rostro de Eva Perón. Dos niños que lucen delantales escolares blancos se acercan a beber con sus manos el líquido que fluye de los senos de Evita-Esfinge. En segundo plano se ve claramente el edificio de la Confederación General del Trabajo (CGT), emplazado sobre una montaña cubierta de árboles y proyectándose sobre el mar. Los colores celeste y blanco de la bandera argentina sirven de trasfondo a las iniciales de la CGT en el edificio. Evita en alianza con los trabajadores de la república alimenta maternalmente a la joven generación del presente, los ciudadanos de la Argentina del futuro.

El libro está organizado en forma cronológica y temática y con un estilo narrativo muy claro, lo que lo hace accesible aun para los lectores no familiarizados con la historia argentina. La obra reconstruye el proceso de formación de los derechos civiles, sociales y políticos de la mujer en Argentina, tratando de hacer