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# Dilemmas of Modernity: Bolivian Encounters with Law and Liberalism (Book Review)

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practice of swooping in to extract knowledge or impart knowledge and resources deserves scrutiny by the subjects themselves and self-scrutiny by the ethnographers and development workers. It is a questionable dynamic that denies what Gow describes as “indigenous modernity,” which questions “certain of the basic tenets of modernity . . . specifically the individualizing role of modern economics” (p. 201).

Ethnographers practicing and critiquing development as well as development practitioners themselves would be well advised to read Gow’s ethnography, but the impact of the book stretches beyond development studies. It includes a detailed case study of education policy and practice at the local level and a close examination of indigenous struggle for participatory citizenship in a more inclusive state. This will articulate with Latin Americanists studying new social movements, democracy, and education, especially, in Mexico, Guatemala, and Bolivia.

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**Dilemmas of Modernity: Bolivian Encounters with Law and Liberalism.** *Mark Goodale.* Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009, 264 pp., 7 tables, 27 illustrations, 2 maps. \$65.00, cloth; \$24.95, paper.

Recent scholarship on Bolivia has focused primarily on indigenous rights, multiculturalism, political and cultural issues surrounding the growing of coca, and the election of Evo Morales. Mark Goodale’s project is different. By taking a “telescopic” view, Goodale steps away from ethnographic detail in a remote district of Bolivia to examine the sweep of “liberal legality” since independence in 1825. Setting the stage, Goodale takes the position that neither neoliberal economic policies of the 1980s nor the election of Morales are breaks with the past. Rather, the “patterns of intention” initiated with the early constitutions of the new republic, the ethos of “liberal legality” or “liberalism expressed through law,” have remained the backdrop for Bolivia’s entire postcolonial history, including the revolution of 1952, often considered the most radically transformative moment in Bolivian history (p. 48). The book is structured as a series of illustrations, drawn from his fieldwork and documentary research in the province of Alonso de Ibañez in the northern department of Potosí, as evidence that “social practices at the ‘local’ level in Bolivia are always, in part, an articulation or dialogue with broader assemblages” (p. 52).

The book is written almost as a response to his own earlier work on Bolivia, a form of refreshing reflexivity. In addition to being about the insertion of a rural backland of a very poor South American country into national, regional, and global processes represented by human rights discourse and international legal frameworks, the book has been fashioned by Goodale as an examination of “specific kinds of social practices . . . that reveal a set of dilemmas at the heart of the modern project itself” (p. 53). To that end, rather than producing a fine-grained ethnographic examination of the places in Alonso de Ibañez where he has conducted research since the late 1990s, Goodale conceives of the book as a critical intellectual history of law and liberalism in postcolonial Bolivia refracted through specific events and his observations of those events in that province so distant from the urban centers. This decision, which Goodale represents as a break from other ethnographic projects in the region, means that at times the book feels a bit disjointed as it “move[s] between registers” (p. 53), while at other times, the reader yearns for voices of the people who are also the subjects of the study. Overall, the book accomplishes what the author sets out to do from his own distinctive perspective.

The substantive core is contained in three chapters that deal with local dispute resolution and legal practices, gender/power/law, and human rights discourse. In each case a “dilemma of modernity” is identified and evocative examples given. Such “dilemmas” (or ironies) include the counterintuitive recognition that law in local areas can be more complex than in urban centers. Invoking Boaventura de Souza Santos’s notion of “interlegality,” Goodale

*Journal of Anthropological Research*, vol. 66, 2010

provides us with support for a mainstay of current legal anthropological thought—the diffuseness of “law” and how “it is to be found outside the control of those institutions that are charged with codifying” it (p. 79). In other words, Bolivia (all of it) is not simply a bastion of empty legalisms and laws on the books, it is a wonderful example of how law in the broader sense unfolds “both outward and inward” (p. 77).

Goodale also examines dilemmas associated with gender relations in a chapter aptly titled “Courts of Desire,” in which he describes the calendar on the local judge’s wall depicting the “judge’s favorite Brazilian porn star” and ruminates on the juxtaposition of women coming to litigate cases of abuse with those calendars and the ubiquitous crucifix looking down on them, although we are not made privy to the reactions of the women who are faced with such symbols at such a stressful moment. As Goodale shows, women constitute a large percentage of the legal actors in rural Bolivia, yet the above scenario reveals the ironic situation in which those women are placed. In this chapter, we also learn more about the local legal intellectual, the province’s only titled lawyer, whose trajectory Goodale traces throughout the book. The lawyer’s intentional use of human rights discourse illustrates the dedication to, and yet distance from, transnational concepts of human rights as translated into the “vernacular” in provincial Bolivia.

Perhaps the most compelling chapter analyzes the coming of human rights discourse to the far reaches of Bolivia as “embedded within a longer flow of discursive currents” (p. 120). In this context, we learn about the Basque Catholic Claretian Order that has provided priests and funding for “development” of the area (a concept treated in the following chapter, “Modern Dreams”). Goodale provides insight into local practices that reflect both the universalism and morality in human rights discourse, through the example of the rise and fall of a legal resource center for women fleeing from abusive homes. At the end of the book, Goodale places human rights discourse (including Bolivia’s ratification of International Labor Organization Convention 169 and the UN’s Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women), neoliberalism under Bolivian presidents for the twenty years beginning in 1985 with the election (for the fourth time since the revolution of 1952) of Paz Estenssoro; the election of Evo Morales, whom many consider a “socialist”; and the establishment of a Constituent Assembly, all under the umbrella of the “universalization of the liberal subject” (p. 179) that has been an essential aspect of Bolivian history since independence. Rather than a series of breaks with the past, Goodale sees the postcolonial history of Bolivia as the trajectory of “modernity’s alchemists” (p. 170) and sees the current political advances for the indigenous majority in the country as “a patrimony of personhood, in which the conception of the subject that fueled the birth of the nation itself was opened to the larger swaths of the populations that had always been excluded from it” (p. 171). In the end, Goodale brings us back to liberal legality, now as the “ordering principle” that is being radically extended in the twenty-first century to serve as both far-reaching and revolutionary.

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**Bacchanalian Sentiments: Musical Experiences and Political Counterpoints in Trinidad.** *Kevin Birth.* Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008, 258 pp. \$74.95, unjacketed cloth; \$21.95, paper.

*Bacchanalian Sentiments* explores the multiple ways that music, politics, and ethnicity intersect in Trinidad, and it does so through a deeply engaging and highly nuanced ethnography of a rural community located near Sangre Grande. Birth accomplishes this localized reading by interrogating the reception and interpretation of music as opposed to analyzing the modes of production and mediation of the music. By thus focusing not on producers per se but rather on consumers and amateur performers, Birth is able to think deeply about music as it becomes useful in everyday life, and this not only as a

*Journal of Anthropological Research*, vol. 66, 2010