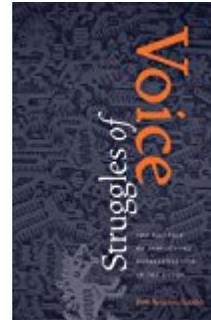


H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences

José Antonio Lucero. *Struggles of Voice: The Politics of Indigenous Representation in the Andes.* Pitt Latin American Studies Series. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2008. 224 pp. \$65.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8229-4352-5; \$25.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8229-5998-4.

Reviewed by Roger P. Davis (University of Nebraska-Kearney)
Published on H-LatAm (November, 2009)
Commissioned by Kenneth Kincaid



Systems and Dynamics of Indigenous Representation

This intriguing analysis of the emergence and effectiveness of Andean indigenous organizations in Ecuador and Bolivia integrates both theory and “actually existing” practice toward supporting the hypothesis that indigenous movements represent a democratizing force in contemporary Latin America. Resting on the subaltern foundations of Benedict Anderson’s “imagined communities” and Albert Hirschman’s definition of “voice” as an effort to change rather than escape from objective realities, this study questions theories of collective action and representation, and offers its own analytical device for valuing the emergence of indigenous activism in the late twentieth century.

In his first two chapters, political scientist José Antonio Lucero wrestles with the theories of articulation, organization, and representation. In his thorough review of the scholarship, the author acknowledges the values of the rationalist and structuralist theories of collective action, which emphasize both individual elements of incentives and created spaces of opportunity for action. However, Lucero finds these approaches “static” with regard to social groups, such as indigenous communities, and so insists on a more cultural approach. Endorsing the “bricolage” analytic model championed by Elizabeth Clemens, Lucero employs what he describes as a “pragmatic constructivist framework” emphasizing a histori-

cal and comparative approach to identify elements of cultural discourse and the construction of identity. Reviewing the theories of representation from Thomas Hobbes through Michel Foucault, Lucero notes that whether defined as “filters” or “mirrors” the representational forms of populism, corporatism, and clientelism dominate most analysis. Lucero again takes exception, and endorses the concept of “associative networks” as the most effective analytical tool. These nonhierarchical structures, which present themselves with great plurality and flexibility, afford greater opportunities to encompass cultural dialogue and the construction of social organization. Having established his analytical trajectory, Lucero then presents a historical analysis of indigenous relations in Ecuador and Bolivia from independence to the present.

The historical discussion, presented in chapters 3 through 6, is divided into three components. The first reviews indigenous relations from independence to 1960. The second focuses on the era of the emergence of the indigenous voice from 1960 through 1990. The third section focuses on the neoliberal challenge from 1990 to the present.

In the first component of historical analysis, Lucero highlights the elements of “ethnic administration” and corporatism as hallmarks of this period. As developed

by Andrés Guerrero, ethnic administration refers to a local or semiprivate system of “repressive ventriloquist representation” (p. 51). In this regard, across the Andes, such institutions as the Catholic Church, hacienda owners, the state, and a variety of administrators spoke on behalf of and for indigenous communities. The corporate structures of the state recognized but dominated the native collective communities. Indigenous communities were represented through elite ventriloquism and tied to the nation through state-created corporate structures. In Bolivia, the indigenous communities, or *ayllus*, remained compatible with the export economy and so remained well in place. In Ecuador, the ayllu structure was generally replaced by the encroachment of haciendas. By the mid-twentieth century when the state had ended tribute and legalized and recognized collective holdings, the reforms applied to the relatively few who were outside of hacienda or other elite control. In both countries, the Indian question focused almost exclusively on the highland indigenous communities. Lowland indigenes in the Amazon basin areas were considered “primitive” and left to the civilizing missions of the church. In Bolivia, despite initial appearances, the revolution of 1952 continued both elements of ethnic administration and corporatism. The new revolutionary state captured the ayllu structures, rechristening them “unions” and their members as rural workers or “campesinos” and naming the state as the voice of the worker.

Lucero marks the agrarian reforms of the 1960s as the beginning of indigenous voice. Initially driven by Communist-affiliated organizing, indigenous groups began to challenge hacendado domination and state control. From this early organization anchored in class-based analysis, by the 1990s indigenous groups successfully created new organizations and moved the discourse from class to ethnic identity. Here Lucero is very adept at drawing the sharp contrasts between Ecuador and Bolivia while clarifying the underlying common dynamic. In Bolivia, the discourse shift sharpened the contrast of highland and lowland indigenous movements. Highland initiatives to defend the traditional ayllu, and even return to an Aymara dominant nation, narrowed their appeal. Meanwhile, led by the Guarani peoples of Cochabamba, and an expanding coca-producing population of “cocaleros,” the lowland organizations created a voice for the “indigenous” which won broader appeal and political support. In Ecuador, successful organization and moves to ethnic discourse marked both regions. Beneath an ethnically and ecologically based concept of “nationalities,” the majority of indigenous groups formed a national fed-

eration that commanded broad political support. Lucero notes that despite the contrasts of experiences the emergence of indigenous terminologies of voice and the capture of significant political roles occurred in both nations.

In the third historical phase, Lucero highlights the surprising compatibility of neoliberal reforms and multiculturalism, which has created opportunities for the further development of indigenous voice. In Bolivia, neoliberalism played this role because it was formally adopted as state policy. In Ecuador, it played this role by emerging as a weak policy agenda and catalyst for national opposition. In Bolivia, the administrations of Paz Estenssoro and Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada fully restructured the state by privatizing national industries, cutting state spending, and decentralizing the state by delegating 20 percent of the national budget to a vastly expanded municipal structure of government. Accompanying these adjustments, the state legalized indigenous territories, emphasized local control of education, and supported bilingualism and multiculturalism as part of localization. These actions energized local indigenous communities as they formed their own municipalities and expanded their political engagement. That engagement enhanced the emerging power of the cocalero movement and ultimately resulted in the election of Evo Morales to the presidency. In Ecuador, where a united indigenous movement was already a national success, their opposition to neoliberal reforms curtailed most of the program, but that success moved the central indigenous federation into government and into politics of accommodation with other groups, threatening to compromise the authenticity of the indigenous voice of the organization. Simultaneously, indigenous groups on the periphery adopted successful strategies and language of the federation and achieved recognition.

In his concluding chapter, Lucero states that his intention for writing *Struggles of Voice* was “to make a case for pragmatic, historically grounded constructivist analysis” and that his review of “the particular histories of indigenous communities, regions, and political institutions has revealed important patterns of indigenous political voices” (pp. 177, 178). He has done a masterful job of accomplishing these ends. However, he also states that “it has been one of the core assumptions and arguments of this book that indigenous movements represent a democratizing force in contemporary Latin America” (p. 189). In this regard, the study offers little more than the assumption. The impressive information and analysis of indigenous organization, representation, and voice are compelling for those purposes, but lacking is the analy-

sis of democratic theory and practice in Latin America and the placement of all of the dynamics presented here within that context.

As with many dissertations turned into books, the construction and overall writing in this volume tends to be somewhat awkward and forced, and many items are needlessly restated. The early chapters maintain the essential jargon of the discipline which obscures clarity for

a more general audience. Overall, however, this is an excellent presentation of significant research and analysis which clearly advances the discussion of contemporary indigenous experience. *Struggles of Voice* deserves to become a staple of graduate study, which may extend the analysis to other Andean regions beyond the two highlighted in this work. Finally, I look forward to the companion piece that carries the discussion into democratic practice in Latin America.

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at:

<https://networks.h-net.org/h-latam>

Citation: Roger P. Davis. Review of Lucero, José Antonio, *Struggles of Voice: The Politics of Indigenous Representation in the Andes*. H-LatAm, H-Net Reviews. November, 2009.

URL: <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=25194>



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 United States License.