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Indigenous Agency in the Amazon: The Mojos in Liberal and Rubber-Boom Bolivia, 1842–1932 by Gary Van Valen

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Indigenous Agency in the Amazon: The Mojos in Liberal and Rubber-Boom Bolivia, 1842-1932 by Gary Van Valen, University of Arizona Press, 2013. 264 pp., illustrations, notes, glossary, references, index.

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Gary Van Valen's *Indigenous Agency in the Amazon* is a thoroughly researched history of how one of the largest indigenous groups in today's Bolivian Amazon, the Mojos, interacted with broader Bolivian society from the creation of the Beni department in 1842 through the beginning of the Chaco War in the 1920s. More specifically, Van Valen documents how Mojos attempted to maintain their identity and independence through a diverse set of strategies during the tumultuous periods of liberal reform and the Amazonian rubber boom. He argues that "the Mojos were not inherently victims or powerless in the face of changes imposed by others, and that they would prove to be active participants in shaping the course liberalism and the rubber boom would take in their region" (p. 3). By illustrating multiple ways in which the Mojos attempted to adapt to these periods, the book illustrates complexity within the common narratives that the rubber boom was uniformly devastating to indigenous people throughout the Amazon, and that their only option for resistance was rebellion.

Liberal reforms associated with Bolivian independence initiated a debate among national leaders about the rights and role of indigenous communities. The reforms included attempts to encourage economic production through private land ownership and labor reforms meant to reduce the effects of colonial-style forced labor and tribute on indigenous groups. In the first two chapters, Van Valen argues that the Mojo's position in the remote frontier Beni department, combined with their early interactions with Jesuit mission culture, created an opportunity for Mojo leadership to use the discourse of liberalism to argue for equal rights, including respect for their cultural distinctiveness. The liberal reforms were ultimately detrimental to Mojo society, but evidence that indigenous leaders in Trinidad, the departmental capital, embraced the concept of Bolivian citizenship and tried to argue for the rights associated with it provide valuable examples of agency.

The rubber boom brought dramatic changes to indigenous life throughout the Amazon region. Van Valen draws on a diverse set of sources to reconstruct the Mojo experience during and after the rubber boom and argues that local conditions are relevant to how indigenous people experienced this turbulent period. While it is clear that indigenous people suffered exploitation, the book also reconstructs the lives of those engaged in different occupations, such as boatmen and rubber gatherers, to illustrate how indigenous people actively attempted to use the best strategies for survival, including migration and employment in the rubber industry. After the 1800s, the range of options narrowed, and indigenous groups faced increasing restrictions and labor demands. In response, many Mojos elected to flee to nearby independent indigenous communities, establish new Mojo settlements, or attempted to find Bolivian patrons who would respect their culture.

One reaction to this narrowing of options provides the most compelling sections of this work. By the early 1800s, many Mojo people had relocated from Trinidad to rural settlements in order to escape the increasing labor demands of the rubber boom. In San Lorenzo, a Mojo millenarian rebellion led by the "Ventriloquist Messiah" Andrés Guayocho emerged during the 1880s. Van Valen carefully reconstructs the rise of Guayocho as an indigenous prophet and the movement's subsequent brutal repression by the Bolivian government. San Lorenzo was burned, rebel leaders killed, and a subsequent brutal purge of Mojos still living in Trinidad created many refugees. However, this was not the end of Mojo resistance. Shortly after the Guayocho rebellion, a group of Mojos led by José Santos Santo Nocos Guaji rebuilt the community of San Lorenzo. Santo Nocos was a strong leader who maintained Mojo cultural practices while

also establishing relations with broader Bolivian society. Van Valen shows how the community of San Lorenzo achieved Guaycho's goal of relative autonomy and maintained control of their land until the Chaco War in the 1920s. Ultimately, this history shows the clearest examples of the multiple forms of Mojo agency.

Indigenous Agency in the Amazon is a thoroughly researched work that presents how the Mojos navigated the challenges associated with liberalism and the rubber boom throughout the late 19th and early 20th centuries by providing historical examples of indigenous agency in Bolivia, an issue that remains relevant today. The book reconstructs an important period of Bolivian history, however, it would have been interesting to see additional context given on connections between Mojo and the larger Beni indigenous population in general. Overall, Van Valen provides an important historiographical contribution by reconstructing the complexities of how the Mojos adapted to the rubber boom through working with local leaders, migrating, participating in the boom as laborers, engaging in resistance, and finally in rebellion. The study of Guaycho's rebellion is particularly compelling and should be of interest to Latin American students and scholars, especially those interested in agency, religious movements, or the social dynamics at play during the Amazonian rubber boom.