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Now We Are Citizens: Indigenous Politics in Postmulticultural Bolivia

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Now We Are Citizens: Indigenous Politics in Postmulticultural Bolivia. Nancy Grey Postero. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2006. 312 pp (cloth)/ 294pp (paper), 6 illustrations, 1 map, references, index. \$70 (cloth), ISBN: 978-0-8047-5519-1. \$26.95 (paper), ISBN: 978-0-8047-5520-7. [www.sups.org].

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Nancy Postero's 'Now we are Citizens' is a detailed and engaging ethnography of Guaraní in Santa Cruz department in the Eastern Bolivian lowlands, which focuses on Guaraní experiences with the neoliberal multicultural reforms passed by the Bolivian Sánchez de Lozada administration during the early 1990s. Postero makes the compelling case that Guaraní along with many other indigenous and popular sectors, have overcome the limitations of neoliberal multiculturalism which have been flagged up by such authors as Charles Hale (e.g. 2002), to engage in new forms of political contestation leading to the enactment of what she calls 'postmulticultural citizenship'. Postero concentrated her fieldwork on Guaraní communities just southeast of the departmental capital Santa Cruz de la Sierra (*Zona Cruz*) and the lives and work of their leaders who operate at the local, municipal and regional level. Postero purports to analyze the processes the reforms have sparked in the communities, and the way they compete with the discourses and interests of Indian and popular actors who may take advantage of them or contest them. 'Now we are Citizens' is informed by the author's long-term engagement with Guaraní communities, where she went for the first time in 1995. This has allowed Postero to craft an ethnography that analyzes developments at communal level over time, from the early years of the neoliberal multicultural to the 'postmulticultural' phase – indication for which she finds in the popular protests that marked Bolivia from 2000 onwards. Not least this wider temporal perspective makes this a must-read for anyone interested in Bolivia's multicultural reforms and the way they impacted on indigenous-state relations and contemporary popular and indigenous political contestation.

'Now we are Citizens' is divided into two parts. *Part One: The Indian Questions* features a historical chapter that traces the bases for contemporary Bolivian indigenous-state relations and 'categories of belonging and Otherness' (page 25), and two ethnographic chapters which engage with the way that Guaraní leaders respond to discourses emanating from the international indigenous rights arena and the organizational demands posed by the neoliberal multicultural climate (for example, the need to formulate organizational 'statutes' to be formally recognized by the state), while at times feeling frustration in the face of the conflicting pressures resulting from tensions between the two. Chapter 2 focuses on the Guaraní federation Capitanía Zona Cruz (CZC) which emerged during the 1990s, and Chapter 3 focuses on a long ongoing dispute over landownership which has divided the Guaraní village Bella Flor. In both cases, leaders broker their power through demonstrating close links to NGOs, appearing eloquent and educated, as well as 'traditional', which corresponded to the desires of migrants to the *Zona Cruz* to maintain a sense of identity and culture in the face of city life. To varying results, they may also engage in clientelist or paternalistic practices, or draw on multicultural or developmentalist rhetoric.

The two initial chapters of *Part Two: Citizenship in Neoliberal Bolivia* engage with the experiences of Guaraní and other Bolivian indigenous peoples with multiculturalism, and more specifically, the Law of Popular Participation (LPP) which legislated for the possibility of Bolivians to participate in the distribution of municipal resources and oversight. In these two chapters, she illustrates one of the key arguments of her book, that the neoliberal multicultural reforms in Bolivia functioned similar to what Charles Hale (2002) has described for the cases of Nicaragua and Guatemala: they offered a limited recognition of indigenous peoples' cultural rights and a degree of self-determination – but only as far as 'indigenous citizens' activities are functional to the governmental agenda. For instance, while indigenous citizens could now participate in municipal governance, to have access to take advantage of these new political spaces, they had to alter their models of representation and organization to fit state-recognized formats (page 160). Chapter 4 explores how Guaraní attempted to adapt to these new requirements, just to realize they generally remained marginalized from local politics in the face of continuing racism, paternalism, clientelism, corrupt practices from the side of traditional elites and their parties, and a lack of 'know-how' with regards to the 'new technologies of knowledge' needed from the side of Guaranís (page 144). The following chapter expands on her argument by taking a close look at the role of domestic NGO in promoting neoliberal notions of citizenship among young Guaraní activists in the *capitanía*. This training, she argues, 'instilled a certain kind of indigenism: a bureaucratic, professional indigenism' (page 185), in line with neoliberal notions of citizenship that are tied to rationalities such as transparency, efficiency, and rational participation.

In Chapter 6, Postero illustrates her second key argument, namely that popular discontent with the neoliberal economic restructuring under way in Bolivia since the mid-1980s combined with ethnic and class-based demands, demands about the fair distribution of natural resources, and disappointment about the limits of the 1990 multicultural reforms to spark the popular upheaval that characterized Bolivia from 2000 onwards. She argues that through contested engagements with neoliberal multiculturalism these new forms of political articulation have moved past demands emanating from ethnic movements during the 1980s and 1990s (e.g. the recognition of ethnic difference, self-determination or territory) to a new era of citizenship practices and contestations. Claims focus on a redefinition of the state and popular access to it, which also entails re-thinking what activists consider their rights to be; consequently, they are also 'forcing radical changes in the meaning of citizenship' (page 6). Postero calls these newly emerging citizenship practices 'postmulticultural citizenship'. These changes, she notes, have been heralded by Morales's election in 2005 and the 2006-2007 constituent assembly, which not only involved a re-definition of the political arena, but also contesting 'cultural meanings embedded in the unequal and hierarchical organization of social relations' (page 6-7).

'Now we are citizens' is a major and very welcome contribution to scholarship engaging with indigenous-state relations in Bolivia, not least because it is an in-depth ethnography on contemporary political contestation and community experiences with neoliberalism and multiculturalism which addresses the situation in the Bolivian lowlands, counterbalancing recent scholarship analyzing similar issues in the more focused-upon highland areas (for instance, Goldstein, 2004; Lazar, 2008). Apart from a few exceptions (e.g. Lema et al., 2001), it may be due to the lack of scholarship on this topic in the Bolivian lowlands that Postero draws much of her comparative material from studies focusing on the highlands; it may however also be due to the fact that she spent a period researching events in the highlands to better understand the events of October 2003 (experiences she especially draws on in Chapter 6). While Postero highlights the obstacles faced by the MAS political project – such as continued resistance by the traditional elite, the lowland autonomy

movement and its own potentially unstable support base – she concludes her book on an upbeat note about the prospects for democracy and the popular power of Bolivia’s postmulticultural citizens, possibly reflecting the optimism among popular sectors in the run-up to the constituent assembly. Very recent scholarship has, however, been slightly more pessimistic with regards to the scope of the new constitution and the MAS political project. In sum, this is an essential and fascinating read for everyone interested in contemporary Bolivian citizenship regimes, neoliberalism and multicultural policies, contemporary popular and indigenous political contestation, and those interested in indigenous leadership patterns, especially in the context of communities dealing with infringing urbanization.

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