

Review: Intimate Political Economies of the Andes

Reviewed Work(s): Rhythms of the Pachakuti: Indigenous Uprising and State Power in Bolivia by Raquel Gutiérrez Aguilar: State Theory and Andean Politics: New Approaches to the Study of Rule by Christopher Krupa and David Nugent: Embodied Protests: Emotions and Women's Health in Bolivia by María Tapias

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BOOK REVIEW ESSAYS

Intimate Political Economies of the Andes

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This essay reviews the following works:

Rhythms of the Pachakuti: Indigenous Uprising and State Power in Bolivia. By Raquel Gutiérrez Aguilar. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014. Pp. ix + 284. \$25.24 paperback. ISBN: 9780822356042.

State Theory and Andean Politics: New Approaches to the Study of Rule. Edited by Christopher Krupa and David Nugent. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015. Pp. v + 328. \$56.56 hardcover. ISBN: 9780812246940.

Embodied Protests: Emotions and Women's Health in Bolivia. By María Tapias. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2015. Pp. ix + 160. \$21.67 paperback. ISBN: 9780252080746.

These three books analyze different, but complementary, aspects of the anthropology and political sociology of the Andean state: Raquel Gutiérrez Aguilar analyzes protest, Christopher Krupa and David Nugent's collection examines state and society, and María Tapias's book investigates how neoliberal economic policies shape conceptions of the body. All three books examine larger political and economic issues from the vantage point of intimate perceptions, emotions, and, in the case of Tapias, bodily sensations. These books not only connect the global with the local, as other works have done in the past, but also articulate different scales of analysis—global, national, and local—with the affects of individuals. As Tapias (129) puts it: “through women's stories I seek to explore what neoliberalism ‘felt like,’ drawing upon their local knowledge of the body, emotions and sociality as these interacted in dialogic relationship with political, juridical and economic state structures.” In doing this, the authors of these books combine perspectives that could be seen as being at odds: Marxian political economy and phenomenological approaches.¹ From the perspective of Marxist theory, phenomenological approaches could be judged as individualistic and even apolitical. However, the authors are able to show the articulations between politics and lived experience. As second-wave feminists would have it, the personal is political.

Looking at the three books from this perspective, Tapias is the author that better achieves the synthesis. Krupa and Nugent make the claim, but not all the chapters that make up the collection use phenomenological approaches or examine the state in relation to affect. Gutiérrez's book focuses on affect in two ways. She privileges the discussion of the “horizons of desire” of the three social movements that she studies in early 2000s Bolivia: the Coalition for the Defense of Water and Life of Cochabamba, the Aymara communities movement of the Bolivian highlands, and the coca growers' union of the Chapare. Furthermore, her personal engagement with these social movements and her privileged access to the spaces and main actors of Bolivian political activism contribute to convey an intimate perspective on Bolivia's politics.

In order to understand Gutiérrez's insights into the social movements of Bolivia, it is important to take into account her personal background, as well as the sources that she uses to conduct her study. Gutiérrez is a Mexican intellectual, currently a professor at the University of Puebla. She met Álvaro García Linera, Bolivia's current vice president, when both were students and political activists in Mexico City. They married and moved to Bolivia, where she lived for decades. While in Bolivia, Gutiérrez worked closely with urban

¹ Phenomenological approaches focus on issues such as lived experience, consciousness, subjectivity, and bodily sensations. See Robert Desjarlais and C. Jason Throop, “Phenomenological Approaches in Anthropology,” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 40 (2011): 87–102.

trade unions and Aymara communities. She joined Red Offensive, a Maoist and Indianist group that in the late 1980s came to favor armed struggle through its division Ejército Guerrillero Tupak Katari (EGTK). As a result of this involvement, Gutiérrez was incarcerated for five years. After coming out of jail, she became a founding member of Comuna, a group of intellectuals and political activists that produced critical theory and conjuncture studies for the purpose of political struggle (Sinclair Thomson in Gutiérrez, xxii). Thus, Gutiérrez's insights into the social movements of Bolivia originate in her personal participation, firsthand knowledge of leaders and familiarity with the grassroots, and other sources such as personal correspondence, interviews, and social movement documents like leaflets, flyers, and petitions that may be out of reach to other researchers (Thomson in Gutiérrez, xiii). The depth of access and the richness of the sources make this book, as Sinclair Thomson argues in the foreword (Gutiérrez, xiii), a document that is close to being a primary source while it is also written with chronological and analytical distance.

Gutiérrez's familiarity with the social movements she studies communicates some interesting insights. For example, she argues that the Coalition for the Defense of Water and Life was not an organization or institution per se but a "space" for citizens and groups to meet and strategize. When she says "space" she means it literally. The space was the Blue Room of the Cochabamba Federation of Factory Workers as well as the sports complex of that organization. The availability of these spaces was instrumental for the social movement to succeed.

Another finding is the central role that organic intellectuals and middle-class professionals played in the Cochabamba Water War. Having read other accounts of the uprising,² I pictured the Water War as a popular uprising. However, Gutiérrez effectively discusses the central roles that engaged intellectuals and their specialized knowledge played in the struggle.

An important analytical tool in Gutiérrez's book is the concept of "interior horizon." Gutiérrez defines it as "the discrepancy between what is done and not said, between what is said and not done, and in what implicitly or explicitly appears to be a desire or potential. In other words, it relates markedly to the collective type of subjectivity that is produced during times of rupture" (xxiv). Some of the most interesting sections of the book are those in which she analyzes the horizons of desire of the three social movements.

The interior horizon of the Coalition for the Defense of Water and Life is, according to Gutiérrez, "clearly anti-capitalist and anti-state"; it has a "potential for autonomous collective intervention in public matters" (192). The interior horizon of the rural and urban Aymara movement is based on "local autonomy on decisive topics for collective life. The movement is characterized by an ambiguous discourse alternating between taking Bolivia back for indigenous people, and negotiation with the powers to be and electoral participation (192–193). The coca grower movement's horizon defends the right to grow and trade coca. The movement has a great deal of experience practicing and defending local autonomy, while also seeking to occupy the central government (193).

The interior horizons of the Bolivian social movements of the first decade of the 2000s as described by Gutiérrez show tensions between antistate tendencies and a desire to capture state power or to be included within the nation. A question that Gutiérrez does not fully address is: Why, from what she characterizes as predominantly antistate tendencies, did a highly centralized state based on charismatic leadership eventually emerge?

Another concept structuring Gutiérrez's book is the "communitarian-popular." The concept is inspired by the 1994 Zapatista uprising in Mexico, the social movements of the first decade of the 2000s in Bolivia, and Red Offensive's aim to build communitarian socialism on the basis of José Carlos Mariátegui's early twentieth-century writings. The concept aims to contrast with René Zavaleta Mercado's idea of "national-popular."³ The main goal in the communitarian-popular is the construction of autonomous and decentralized power outside the state, as well as the search for a direct form of democracy that rejects representative democracy. Furthermore, Gutiérrez proposes that communitarian forms of organization be implemented at the national level. To better explain the community perspective, Gutiérrez develops a vivid and subtle description of life in the Aymara communities. The problem that Gutiérrez finds with the communitarian-popular is that the communities, while having effective ways to organize and powerful repertoires for collective action, have difficulties articulating a coherent political project and communicating it to other groups (193).

² Nicole Fabricant, "Good Living For Whom? Bolivia's Climate Justice Movement and the Limitations of Indigenous Cosmovisions," *Latin American and Caribbean Ethnic Studies* 8, no. 2 (2013): 159–178; Willem Assies, "David vs. Goliath in Cochabamba: Water Rights, Neoliberalism and Social Protest in Bolivia," *Latin American Perspectives* 30, no. 3 (2003): 14–36.

³ See René Zavaleta Mercado, *Lo nacional-popular en Bolivia* (Mexico City: Siglo XXI, 1986). Zavaleta Mercado's concept of the national-popular is based on the search for economic and political inclusion of social heterogeneity. Differently from the search for inclusion, the communitarian-popular highlights local autonomy and antistate tendencies.

Apart from a focus on the interior horizon, Gutiérrez also analyzes the flow of events or what she calls “the practical scope of the struggle.” Pachakuti is an important concept from this perspective. She defines Pachakuti as a disruption of normality and an inversion in the chain of command. The concept resonates with the Zapatista slogan of *mandar obedeciendo* or “command by obeying.” Gutiérrez argues that revolutionary subjectivities emerge in moments of rapid change as a carnivalesque inversion of power relations. She explains that in traditional Andean culture, festivals mark everyday life. If a revolt is sufficiently popular, she argues, it will also resemble a carnival.

Similarly, Christopher Krupa and Daniel Nugent start their edited collection with a reflection on the swift transformations that have taken place in the Andes in recent decades, from neoliberal restructuring and state contraction to these states becoming an anti-neoliberal vanguard. As a result, the authors argue, Andean citizens have felt contrasting emotions in relation to the state, such as anxiety about what the state is, loss of certainty in how political life is to be organized, and hopes and high expectations that states would solve the various dilemmas of their daily life. These emotions are the focus of this collection. The volume features a theoretical introduction, solid case studies by authors that are well known in the field of political anthropology, history, and Andean studies, and two theoretical afterwords.

State Theory and Andean Politics analyzes people's perceptions of the location of the state. Is the state present or absent, proximate or distant, centralized or not? The book defines states as eminently off-centered political fields and utilizes off-centered locations for the analysis of the state. Following Philip Abrams,⁴ Krupa and Nugent argue that to interpret the state as off-centered means to denaturalize it as the core of political life. It also means to question its coherence (5). Furthermore, different actors may claim the state and seek to conduct their political projects under the umbrella of the state.

Two studies of the Putumayo region of Colombia by María Clemencia Ramírez and Winifred Tate best represent the off-centered nature of the state. Ramírez and Tate each shows how diverse actors such as the FARC (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia) guerrillas and the paramilitary claim state status. Ramírez argues that FARC guerrillas fluctuate between creating an alternative to the state and the pragmatism of negotiating with state authorities. The paramilitary, on their part, are an expression of a state policy that delegates military functions to citizens. Ramírez also shows that discourses about Putumayo, a region that is represented as abandoned by the state and violence ridden, contribute to the false assumption that the political center is legitimate, coherent, well serviced, and respectful of human rights.

Nicole Fabricant, in her chapter on elites fighting for autonomy in the eastern lowlands of Bolivia, also addresses well the off-centeredness of the state. She asks: What happens when those in the margins—indigenous peoples—capture state power and elites lose their grip on the state? The answer is interesting: elites in Santa Cruz adopt discourses formerly used by indigenous peoples to claim their autonomy from the central state.

In her chapter in the collection, Mercedes Prieto develops the concept of “state event,” such as legal inspections, literacy campaigns, and hygiene missions. The Ecuadorian state typically related to the indigenous population through episodic contacts that were limited in scope and implemented by delegates, which transformed indigenous people in “partial state subjects” (Krupa and Nugent, 163).

Krupa and Nugent propose methodologies for “off-centering” the state. One of these routes is the “critical phenomenology of rule” or the study of how the state is apprehended. They look at how people draw selectively from a variety of experiences of everyday life to form their own idea of the state. They also look at the roles of fantasy, imagination, and delusion in state formation. They call this method a nonrealist approach to the state. There is some tension in the volume between an understanding of the state as ideology—a way to occult the privatization of the public and unfair domination⁵—and the state as something that citizens are able to apprehend at will. As Gyanendra Pandey notes, the unresolved tension is explained by the combination of Marxian and poststructuralist perspectives (Krupa and Nugent, 259–269).

For the authors, nonrealist also means to avoid reifying the state. Krupa and Nugent argue that the idea of the centralized state is a representation created by the state itself, a technology of power. The editors affirm that we cannot study the state, but only those objects that stand for the state as well as those practices through which consent and identification are solicited. For instance, Krupa's chapter on rural land titling and taxation in Ecuador shows how the *cadastre* may stand for the state and may be a means to solicit legitimacy for the state. Kim Clark's chapter on public health institutions in Ecuador also discusses state formation as an attempt to seek legitimacy. As Clark argues, state projects become persuasive only when they

⁴ Philip Abrams, “Notes on the Difficulty of Studying the State (1977),” *Journal of Historical Sociology* 1, no. 1 (1988): 58–89.

⁵ Abrams, “Notes on the Difficulty.”

fulfill at least some of the aspirations of citizens. However, Clark also shows the messiness of state practices. In campaigns to eradicate the bubonic plague, indigenous peasants were inoculated with defective vaccines that killed them instead. Sick indigenous women were raped while in the custody of public health officials. Thus, while the state may project an image of coherence, it is made up of a variety of practices, institutions, actors, and objects that may or may not put forward a coherent project. This idea builds on previous works.⁶

A second idea within nonrealist approaches to the state is to take into account fantasy, fear, and emotion in processes of state formation. David Nugent best develops this in his chapter on state formation in early twentieth-century highland Peru. Nugent shows that government officials design modernization projects that ignore the resources that are available in the region. Then, other government officials invent wild conspiracy theories to excuse the foreseeable failure of the projects. The reason why the truth cannot be stated—and why fantasy is so important to Peruvian state formation—is the contrast between the liberal ideals of the Peruvian state and the social reality characterized by unbearable inequalities and a great deal of coercion. Although the approach is innovative, it may have been inspired by previous works such as Michael Taussig's *Shamanism, Colonialism, and the Wild Man*, which discusses how politicized fictions create the effect of the real.⁷

A third organizing thread in the collection relies on Marxist interpretations of state formation as a cultural process that is rooted in violence and that seeks to normalize political subjection, conceal vested interests, and silence subaltern voices. Following Abrams, the authors see the state as a bid to elicit support for the insupportable by presenting itself as legitimate and disinterested domination. The authors call this process the “state effect.”

Krupa and Nugent play with the term “state effect” to give birth to their own phrase, “state affect,” which takes us back to the issue of emotions. State affect, according to the authors, refers to the affective bond of obligation between the state and citizens and to citizens' faith that the state has obligations toward them in relation to the most important issues in their lives. The editors argue that since these obligations remain most of the time unfulfilled, the most common emotions that people feel towards the state are frustration and disappointment. Perhaps the chapter by Winifred Tate on the Colombian Amazon better represents the state affect. Tate shows how citizens and local government officials seek to build what she calls an “aspirational state” despite widespread lack of government services and generalized violence.

An interesting theme that runs through the chapters, but that is not highlighted in the introduction, is the legacy of the colonial state for modern Andean states. Irene Silverblatt starts her chapter stating: “Contemporary Andean polities are haunted by colonial legacies. Yet colonial legacies, so critical to the modern Andes, are often disregarded in studies of modern state making” (Krupa and Nugent, 167). Silverblatt argues that colonialism lies at the heart of the modern experience, combining modern bureaucratic rationality with hierarchical race thinking. She goes on to demonstrate that the Spanish Inquisition was a modern bureaucracy that froze racial hierarchies. Silverblatt could have explained more clearly the implications of her research for modern Andean states, but perhaps that is for others to do. Karen Spalding's chapter argues that native political traditions had more impact on the colonial state than is often acknowledged. All this changed with the reforms of Viceroy Francisco Alvarez de Toledo (1515–1582), who imposed a more centralized monopoly of authority and aimed to behead native nobility (a centralized instead of an off-centered state?). Akhil Gupta in his afterword entitled “Viewing States from the Global South” follows up on the debate of the colonial state by comparing Latin America with India.

Although the editors open the collection with a reference to the anti-neoliberal tide in the Andean region in the first decade of the 2000s, all case studies except for one (Fabricant's chapter on the Camba autonomy movement in Santa Cruz, Bolivia) are either historical or focus on the neoliberal period. Why not focus on state formation under so-called post-neoliberal governments?⁸ One reason could be the slow pace of academia, where research takes long to be published. However, the anti-neoliberal tide in the Andes dates back to the first decade of the 2000s, and this book was published in 2015. Another possible reason for not including studies of post-neoliberal state formation is that what was happening in Venezuela, Bolivia, and Ecuador, a process of centralization and reinforcement of the state, may have contradicted the main theses

⁶ Philip Corrigan and Derek Sayer, *The Great Arch: English State Formation as Cultural Revolution* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1985); Gilbert M. Joseph and Daniel Nugent, eds., *Everyday Forms of State Formation: Revolution and the Negotiation of Rule in Modern Mexico* (Durham, NC: Duke, 1994).

⁷ Michael Taussig, *Shamanism, Colonialism, and the Wild Man: A Study in Terror and Healing* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997).

⁸ Sarah Elwood, Patrick Bond, Carmen Martínez Novo, Sarah Radcliffe, “Learning from Postneoliberalisms,” *Progress in Human Geography* 41, no. 5 (2017): 676–695.

of this volume: that states are always off-centered. Are there highly centralized and institutionalized states beyond the realm of ideology?

For instance, it is surprising that a book focusing on state formation in the Andes does not include a chapter on Venezuela. Of the three chapters on Ecuador, two are historical and the third focuses on the neoliberal period. Fabricant's article, the only addressing an anti-neoliberal regime, focuses on a peripheral region and on elites resisting the changes. Furthermore, a great deal of attention is given to the Colombian Amazon, a region where the state may be perceived as more clearly off-centered. Are states always off-centered? Or are the editors picking and choosing the periods, countries, and regions that better fit their interpretation? As Pandey argues in his afterword, how do authoritarian states fit within the theory of off-centeredness?

Moreover, the idea of the off-centered state better fits the neoliberal state model. As is well known, under neoliberal policies the state retrenches and shrinks. Neoliberalism also encourages decentralization as it transfers state responsibilities to localities and citizens in order to save money and reduce the budget.⁹ From this point of view, countries undergoing neoliberal processes may better fit the model of the off-centered state. Furthermore, neoliberalism is an important debate in the global North, where post-neoliberal experiments have been less significant and durable than in Latin America.

The editors argue that their analysis is a novel way to look at the state (14). However, a number of the volume's main points build on earlier works on the anthropology and political sociology of the state. I have discussed above previous analyses that questioned the coherence of the state and that focused on the role of fantasy for state formation. The concept of off-centeredness also resonates with the collection *Anthropology in the Margins of the State* edited by Veena Das and Deborah Poole.¹⁰ Das and Poole argued that the state should be studied from the vantage point of the margins (from off-centered perspectives?). Poole, Das, and Talal Asad showed that the state is not absent, but over-present in the margins.¹¹ This is because they understood the state not as a thing, but as a process that continuously reasserts itself, and it does so more strongly in the margins. The idea of state elites presenting themselves as working for the common good and other legitimate goals while pursuing their own particularistic aims was first introduced by Abner Cohen's pioneering book *The Politics of Elite Culture*.¹²

Drawing on phenomenology and political economy in ways that resonate with *State Theory and Andean Politics*, Tapias's book examines how global factors affect people's understandings of illness and their own bodies. The author shows that from a Bolivian folk perspective, illness and symptoms are caused by emotions, and emotions are affected by the poverty and violence of everyday life. *Embodied Protests* is based on two years of fieldwork conducted in 1996–1998 and subsequent shorter visits to Punata, a provincial market town located in the Bolivian Highlands. The town is near the Chapare lowlands, where coca is grown. Punata regularly does business with the Chapare as people travel there to work, sell, or transport others. The Chapare's economy and human rights were affected by the War on Drugs implemented by the United States with help from the Bolivian government. This happened shortly after neoliberal restructuring limited job opportunities and curtailed government services and subsidies. Tapias is interested in evaluating how all this social suffering articulates to conceptions of illness. Most of her interviewees are the Quechua- and Spanish-speaking market women of Punata.

Bolivia was a testing ground for neoliberal reforms of the early 1980s, and it is well known for its massive anti-neoliberal protests. The coca economy mitigated the costs of neoliberal reforms, but that safety valve was closed when the United States and Bolivia implemented coca eradication policies. As a result, people in Punata resorted to an alternative strategy: international migration to Spain. While international migration helped alleviate poverty, it caused other forms of suffering when families were split apart.

Tapias argues that the body and illness are profoundly social. In Punata, emotions in response to socioeconomic stress like rage, sorrow, and nostalgia for loved ones are believed to cause symptoms. Unexpressed anger in particular is thought to make people very sick. Failed sociality, when networks of support are unable to meet expectations, adds to the social suffering. Social suffering and failed sociality are embodied in folk illnesses such as *susto* (fright), *pachamama* (a special illness that occurs when negative emotions are expressed in sacred places), *arrebato* (diarrhea and vomiting), and *aire* (stroke). Tapias understands emotions as a mediating factor between the body and the social world.

⁹ David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

¹⁰ Veena Das and Deborah Poole, eds., *Anthropology in the Margins of the State* (Santa Fe, NM: School of American Research Press, 2004).

¹¹ Talal Asad, "Where Are the Margins of the State?," in Das and Poole, *Anthropology in the Margins of the State*, 279–288.

¹² Abner Cohen, *The Politics of Elite Culture: Explorations in the Dramaturgy of Power in a Modern African Society* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981).

The author argues that in Bolivia people speak of emotions such as rage and sorrow as if they were fluids that accumulated in the body. These fluids build up more dramatically when emotions are not expressed. Fluid emotions also circulate between bodies. For instance, mother's milk can pass illness to a lactating child. Emotions can also be eliminated when liquids are expelled, for example vomiting.

Tapia argues that those who are less powerful (the poor, indigenous people, women, younger people) are more likely to get sick because it is harder for them to express their emotions, particularly when interacting with a more powerful party. A chapter on breast-feeding shows that the sorrow caused by poverty and domestic violence can "damage" a mother's milk. If the woman breast-feeds her child, she is blamed for making the baby sick or even for killing it. Tapias criticizes these beliefs because they blame poor mothers for what ultimately are structural factors. However, Tapias also shows how young women resist the idea that their milk is permanently damaged and still breast-feed their babies. In a context of economic distress, to require women not to breast-feed could have dire consequences for child's health.

Tapias's chapter on how emotions travel with migration to Spain is particularly compelling. She argues that the main communication strategies in the context of migration are silence and secrecy. Migrants withheld information from families back home to prevent emotions from making relatives sick. In addition, migrants withheld information from each other in Spain to avoid envy, a powerful negative emotion that can make people ill and cause bad luck and even death.

Embodied Protests effectively demonstrates how neoliberalism feels to individuals. Similarly to Krupa and Nugent's volume, this book combines Marxist and phenomenological approaches. However, Tapias explores emotions more fully than the edited volume perhaps because the book is a monograph. Like *State Theory and Andean Politics* and *Rhythms of the Pachakuti*, Tapias's book focuses on the neoliberal period and does not fully examine the effects of a decade of government by Evo Morales (2006–present). However, she does use current anthropological theory and up-to-date approaches to political economy.

The three books reviewed here exemplify a trend that combines various theoretical approaches in an eclectic fashion. Marxian language, Foucaultian perspectives, and phenomenological approaches are blended with different degrees of success. One danger of the eclectic strategy is that the Marxist perspective may be depoliticized and downgraded to mere jargon. On the other hand, looking at how large processes affect intimate aspects, including emotions and the body, has great value if done well and reflects important contributions from feminist theory. The intimate outlook on social movement subjectivities may also illuminate aspects that would be unavailable otherwise.

Author Information

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