

Introduction

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In 1968, an article entitled “Anthropology and Imperialism” in the US journal *Monthly Review* challenged anthropologists to confront the worrying gap that seemed to separate their academic discipline from the political passions and complexities of a modernizing, capitalist, and militarized world. Arguing that “anthropology is a child of Western imperialism,” the article’s author, Kathleen Gough, charged that anthropologists had ignored this reality to act, either implicitly or explicitly, as defenders of their nations’ colonial and imperial projects. Although some anthropologists had begun to study processes of urban migration, proletarianization and social change, Gough argued that the hardening of imperial and revolutionary currents would now oblige them to expand their reach even further to include revolutionary movements, nationalist identities, and the political aspirations of the marginal or subject peoples with whom anthropologies had always worked.

In subsequent years, as anthropologists and their subjects have together moved through the antiwar and decolonization movements of the 1960s and 1970s, the postcolonial critique of the 1980s, and the rise in the 1990s of identity based, sectarian, and antisystemic politics, Gough’s charge has lost its radical edge to assume instead the implicit force of a received truth. Anthropology today is invested in a wide range of ethical, political and humanitarian debates and most anthropologists readily accept the argument that their discipline should both be politically engaged and embrace distinctive, even discrepant political voices. As it has moved through crisis and recovery, the discipline has been significantly expanded. Anthropologists now study pretty much everything, from laboratory scientists and development workers, to financial markets, genomes and transnational political movements. Thus, if anthropology can still be somewhat broadly defined as “the study of other cultures and societies,” the location of that “other” has been left up for grabs: The other is both out there in the world and inside the very methodologies, theoretical claims and epistemologies that define the work of anthropology. However, although anthropology may well have lost its original claim to have a distinctive *subject matter* – the “non-Western” or “primitive” cultures of the world – its recovery has brought a new claim

to disciplinary distinction grounded in methodologies of encounter and acknowledgment. Anthropology has thus grown, somewhat unevenly, into the social science discipline that is best positioned to acknowledge the philosophical and ethical priority of alterity as the necessary grounds for articulating responsible (and, in Gough's terms, nonimperialistic) claims to political and scientific knowledge. This move is, perhaps, best observed in anthropologists' growing commitment to redefine the political and ethical force of their discipline through a critical engagement with such traditional anthropological methodologies and concepts as ethnography, comparison, locality, culture, tradition, and indigeneity.

The Latin American anthropologies surveyed in this Companion offer a privileged perspective on the relevance, force and passion of anthropology as a discipline that studies and embraces both alterity and activism. Indeed, the very idea that anthropology could be anything *but* engaged is one that does not resonate easily with the experience of anthropologists working in Latin America. Since its emergence as a field of scientific study in the 19th century, the discipline took its cues from new liberal states whose national and cultural identities were formed in a complex dialogue with their Spanish and Portuguese colonizers. Throughout their history, Latin American anthropologists have also had to contend with the cultural and academic imperialism of their powerful neighbor to the north. Many have had to carry out their research in the shadow of repressive governments and dictatorships who were benefactors of US economic and military support. More recently still, Latin American anthropologists have been challenged by the demands of their own research "subjects" for the expanded participation of indigenous and other subaltern anthropologists.

The chapters collected in this Companion offer an entry into these experiences, histories and debates that comprise Latin American anthropology. They tell the story of anthropologies that developed in tandem with the liberal nation-state, and of anthropologists who often played critical roles in defining both the ideological contours of national cultures and the administrative and governmental policies through which culturally and ethnically diverse populations were governed and, at times, subdued. They also, however, tell stories of anthropologists who defended indigenous and economically marginalized populations from state abuses, who have struggled with the need to incorporate indigenous voices into their discipline and research, and who have crafted a regionally specific disciplinary agenda around issues of social justice and activism. Together these stories suggest that Latin American anthropologies were like European and US anthropologies to the extent that their theoretical priorities and applications were often shaped by the needs of conservative states and by the policies of internal colonialism through which states attempted to subjugate indigenous peoples. At the same time, they clearly point toward important regional differences in that – with very few exceptions – the "native" subjects of Latin American anthropologists did not live in far-off lands, but rather formed part of the same nation-state as the anthropologist. Although early US and European anthropologies were also founded, to differing degrees, on the study of internally colonized peoples, Latin American anthropologists often approached their "native" subjects with a desire to understand what it was that *they* shared, as national and cultural subjects, with their ethnographic subjects. As many of the authors in this volume argue, this understanding of anthropology as a discipline that is premised on concerns with intimacy and

belonging gives the anthropology practiced by Latin American anthropologists a distinctive resilience, creativity and salience in the modern world.

The culturally and linguistically diverse geographic region now known as Latin America has also played a distinctive role in the formation of the theoretical and comparative sensibilities of sociocultural anthropology. The Americans later known as “Indians” offered Europeans their first encounter with radical alterity, forcing the Catholic Church to rule on such matters as the distribution of souls, and Iberian intellectuals to come to grips with the existence of cities and states that were many times larger and richer than those of contemporary Europe. Somewhat later, the French philosopher Michel Montesquieu drew on his encounter with a Tupi-Guarani prince to launch a debate that would be foundational to the European Enlightenment. How, Montesquieu asked in his famous 1580 essay “Of Cannibals,” can “we call these people barbarous in respect to the rules of reason; but not in respect to ourselves, who in all sorts of barbarity exceed them?” Similar curiosity about Inca governance, Tupi culture, and Aztec religion helped the 18th century philosophes to imagine more beneficent forms of governance and to conjure the utopian imaginaries that would fuel European political reform. The indigenous peoples of Latin America also figured prominently in the 19th century debates about racial origins, racial classification, language and cultural evolution launched by anthropologists such as Alcides d’Orbigny, William Tylor, Daniel Brinton, and Lewis Henry Morgan. Although the positivist methodologies and racist premises of these debates were later rejected by post-Boasian and post-Durkheimian anthropologists, the discipline’s claims to scientific status continued in many respects to rely on these early ethnological experiments in the comparative, predictive and classificatory study of Latin America’s native civilizations.

If Latin America’s indigenous peoples figured from the beginning as an inspiration for political theory, a source for museum collections, and a laboratory for ethnological and racial classification, its creole intellectuals and scientists also participated as important interlocutors for European and US anthropologists. Although most 19th century Latin American intellectuals actively embraced contemporary ideologies of progress, racial distinction, and societal evolution, many also contested the application of such theories to portray their nations as inferior and incapable of progress. Most notably, by the late 19th and early 20th century, some anthropologists and intellectuals in Latin America began to articulate theories concerning the “vigor” and resilience of their countries’ mixed or *mestizo* races as a productive counterpoint to the charges of racial inferiority leveled against them by those who believed in the natural superiority of the European or “Anglo-Saxon” races. Although these proponents of *mestizaje* subscribed to the same doctrines of racial determination that drove European racial theories, they did so in the interests of defending the “civilizational” achievements of their nations and region. Thus, no matter how misguided these early racial anthropologies now appear, it is important to acknowledge that they shared with later, more critical perspectives on cultural difference an understanding that anthropology is necessarily configured through the intimate relationships that bind political polemic, social change and nation-building to academic scholarship.

The social anthropologies that took shape in the universities, government offices, Catholic parishes, and indigenous and non-governmental organizations of 20th century Latin America assumed distinct political positions to those of their 19th century predecessors. These anthropologies were shaped by two intellectual traditions.

The first was the broad cultural, political and intellectual movement known as *indigenismo*. Indigenistas defended the cultural traditions, histories and rights of their nations' "first peoples." Many also protested contemporary ideologies of indigenous racial inferiority by claiming indigenous racial and cultural attributes as part of their own personal identities. Others drew on philosophy to articulate intellectual and political agendas that privileged indigenous spiritual and cultural traditions as a counterpoint to the rapacious ideologies of economic development and "progress" that drove European science.

Although the indigenistas' willingness to speak *for* the Indians they claimed to represent has frequently been decried as a sign of their inauthenticity or even duplicity, the indigenista movement as a whole nevertheless set an important precedent for Latin American anthropology. Not only did they deploy their knowledge of indigenous culture and history to advocate for policies and laws which they believed would address problems of indigenous poverty and marginalization, but they also muddied the conceptual and perceptual divides through which US and European anthropologists framed their accounts of the "other" as an object of scientific inquiry. Even the most conservative of the indigenistas predicated their studies of Indians in terms of their actual or potential membership in a national community. For indigenistas, the "native" was both a subject of academic inquiry and an interiorized, often conflictive, dimension of the anthropologist's own identity and life.

A second crucial force shaping Latin American anthropology has been left-wing political movements and the struggle for social justice. The histories chronicled in these chapters describe the diverse affiliations, both critical and partisan, that linked Latin American anthropologists with their nations' left-wing political parties and organizations. Although many anthropologists viewed the traditional left's focus on class and the economy as a threat to a disciplinary subject matter focused on culture and race, others drew on Marxist theory to expand the reach of anthropological inquiry to include issues of economic dependency, internal colonialism, peasant economies, nationalism, and the state. In this way, Latin American anthropologists were able to locate their subjects – Indians, peasants, and the urban poor – within broader geographies of power, and to redefine the disciplinary staples of culture, kinship, and community to include considerations of inequality, class, and local political power. Even language – which was long considered as the key indicator of cultural continuity – was from the 1970s onwards reconceptualized as a domain of cultural and political practice shaped by unequal access to political and economic power, as well as by historical strategies of resistance.

Armed with the new theoretical tools provided by their critical embrace of Marxist theory and by an increased awareness of how historical patterns of inequality played out in the lives of their "traditional" research subjects, anthropologists in Latin America formed crucial interlocutors for the indigenous and Afro-Latin American organizations that emerged in the final decades of the 20th century. These movements drew on international human rights law and the (limited) recognition of cultural rights offered by the neoliberal constitutional reforms of the 1980s to demand increased access to resources, territorial and political autonomy, and more participatory forms of democracy at a national level. Indigenous organizations have been at times critical of both anthropology, as a discipline that claimed expertise in indigenous lifeways, and *indigenismo*, as a politico-philosophical current that often spoke in the name of

indigenous peoples. Over time, however, these conversations and quarrels between anthropology and indigenous organizations have been productive. They have produced what Rossana Barragán describes in her chapter on Bolivian anthropology as “bridges and chasms” that unite and separate anthropology and indigenous politics in a dynamic exchange of ideas. The end result has been an anthropology that has been strengthened by the inclusion of increasing numbers of professional anthropologists who study their own cultures and communities. Reciprocally, indigenous movements have also drawn critically on anthropologists’ and historians’ knowledge of their peoples’ political practices, social forms, and histories to mobilize strategic definitions of cultural affiliation, ethnic territoriality and political autonomy.

The activist and advocacy role of anthropologists in such popular political struggles for policy reform, legal recognition and political inclusion has reinforced the already strong historical links between anthropology and the nation-state in Latin America. As several chapters in this volume argue, the nationalist frameworks within which this engagement with indigenous politics has unfolded has proven troubling for many foreign anthropologists. Yet Latin America’s indigenous and politically engaged anthropologies have contributed to discussions of ethical and political responsibility that extend well beyond the national and regional boundaries of Latin America. As Latin American anthropologists struggle to accommodate their understandings of what constitutes sound research practices and responsible claims to knowledge, they have helped to shift the discipline as a whole towards a greater capacity to acknowledge how local forms of life figure as alternative “civilizing projects” and how subaltern forms of knowledge can help us to rethink the ethical and political configuration of our academic disciplines.

The stories of research, theory building, government collaboration, and critical, even revolutionary, practice recounted in the different contributions to this Companion describe an arena of academic practice distinguished by considerable scientific and scholarly achievements. They tell the stories of Latin American anthropologists who have offered theoretical innovations to our understandings of ethnicity, kinship, inequality, social justice, violence and resistance. Above all, they tell the story of anthropologists whose work and lives have much to teach to others who hope to reclaim the political, philosophical and ethical relevance of anthropology in the current moment.

At the same time, the story of anthropology in Latin America has not always been a happy one. Each of the chapters in this book chronicles not only the achievements, but also the difficulties of “doing anthropology” in Latin America. Those professional anthropologists in Latin America who are lucky enough to get a job in a university often juggle two or more teaching positions. Others attempt to reconcile their political beliefs and scholarly standards to their professional reliance on state agencies and administrative work. Those who refuse to do so often face political repression and censorship. Others struggle to accommodate their research agendas to shifting fashions in the international development industry that contracts local anthropologists to carry out studies of indigenous and poor populations. Finally, with some exceptions, Latin American anthropologists must face misrecognition and marginalization within international anthropological circles dominated by English language journals, conferences and publications, and by anthropologists and theorists with more visible positions in the prestigious and relatively well-paid universities of “the North.”

This book offers an entry to the history and experience of Latin American anthropologists. The chapters include contributions by anthropologists who work and live in the countries they study, as well as by anthropologists who study and teach on Latin America in British and US universities. Rather than providing comprehensive overviews or summaries, authors were asked to draw on their own work to engage thematic debates and histories within Latin American anthropology. By organizing – and in some cases, centering – their overviews of national anthropologies and theoretical debates around examples drawn from their own work, they provide the reader with a clear sense of how engaged ethnographic fieldwork has shaped the production of anthropological knowledge in the region. The eight chapters in part I, “Locations,” provide an introduction to the anthropological traditions of Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, Guatemala, Mexico, and Peru. Together these chapters offer a sense of the intimate institutional, political and affective ties that bind anthropology to the nation-state in Latin America. The nine chapters grouped in part II, “Debates,” provide an introduction to some of the key thematic and conceptual debates animating anthropological work in Latin America. Some chapters focus on what might be thought of as the historical “gate-keeping concepts” of race, place, language, kinship, and land reform that many anthropologists will easily associate with Latin American anthropology. Other chapters on law, borders, sovereignty, science, and statistics outline the important contributions which Latin American anthropologies have made to the ethnographic study of the state, globalization and the political economies of disciplinary knowledge. Together they offer a sense of the many innovative, critical and conceptual contributions through which anthropological work in Latin America has enlivened social, political and anthropological theory. The chapters gathered in part III, “Positions,” all speak to Latin American anthropologists’ enduring commitment to activism, collaboration and engagement. While some deal with polemics concerning identity, migration, voice and indigenous anthropologies, others chronicle anthropologists’ efforts to bring disciplinary knowledges to bear on violence, suffering and the work of recovery in the aftermath of political conflict and state terror.

If a single quality could be said to characterize Latin America as a region, that quality might well be its unsettling diversity. Latin America is home to peoples who originally came from Africa, Europe, Asia and the Middle East. Its indigenous peoples today speak over 600 different languages, representing 56 language families. Over time, its political elites and states have governed through an amazing, and sometimes very creative array of political positions and ideologies. The social and political energies and abilities of the indigenous, subaltern, and marginal peoples whom anthropologists often study are astounding, lending strength to the region’s resilient left-wing, critical and utopian traditions of social change. In similar spirit, the range of issues, questions and methodologies deployed by the region’s anthropologists are also far-ranging and diverse. This volume makes no claim to represent or much less speak for all of them. It was not possible, for example, to include chapters on all of the countries or even subregions of Latin America in part I. This Companion, for example, does not include chapters on the rich anthropological traditions of the Caribbean. Similarly, the overview of current debates in part II does not pretend to be inclusive of all of the contributions which Latin American anthropologies have made to broader disciplinary debates. Finally, the selection of “Positions” in part III is necessarily just

that: a selection. Like the best traditions within Latin American anthropology, then, the chapters contained in this volume seek to be neither totalizing nor even particularly comprehensive in their claims to speak *for* a region, a people, or a place. Rather what this companion volume offers is a cross-section of voices speaking from within the varied spaces occupied by Latin American anthropologies. The space they describe is one in which political commitment and polemic have never been conceived of as outside the domain of anthropology, and in which anthropologists have played important roles in recrafting the conceptual, theoretical and methodological boundaries of their discipline as a whole.

