

REVIEW ESSAY

Beyond Benedict Anderson: Nation-Building and Popular Democracy in Latin America*

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Beyond Imagined Communities. Reading and Writing the Nation in Nineteenth-Century Latin America. Ed. by Sara Castro-Klarén and John Charles Chasteen. Woodrow Wilson Center Press, Washington DC; Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore [etc.] 2003. 280 pp. \$45.00. (Paper: \$22.95.)

BOYER, CHRISTOPHER ROBERT. Becoming Campesinos. Politics, Identity, and Agrarian Struggle in Postrevolutionary Michoacán, 1920–1935. Stanford University Press, Stanford (Cal.) 2003. xii, 320 pp. Ill. £45.95.

FORMENT, CARLOS A. Democracy in Latin America, 1760–1900. Volume I, Civic Selfhood and Public Life in Mexico and Peru. [Morality and Society Series.] University of Chicago Press, Chicago [etc.] 2003. xxix, 454 pp. Maps. \$35.00; £24.50.

LARSON, BROOKE. Trials of Nation Making. Liberalism, Race, and Ethnicity in the Andes, 1810–1910. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge [etc.] 2004. xiii, 299 pp. Ill. Maps. \$70.00; £45.00. (Paper: \$24.99; £17.99.)

Studies in the Formation of the National State in Latin America. Ed. by James Dunkerley. Institute of Latin American Studies, University of London, London, 2002. 298 pp. £14.95; € 20.00; \$19.95.

In his now-famous and widely cited *Imagined Communities*, Benedict Anderson devotes a chapter to American nations, which he renames “creole pioneers” in the second edition.¹ Focusing especially on Latin America, Anderson set these nations apart for two reasons. First, because language was not an element that differentiated them from their imperial metropolis;

* I want to thank Barbara Weinstein for her incisive and helpful comments on an earlier draft of this essay.

1. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, extended and revised edition (London, 1991).

secondly, because of the absence of a significant middle class at the moment of their independence. This leads him to the question: “Why was it precisely *creole* communities that developed so early conceptions of their nation-ness – *well before most of Europe?*”²

Trying to answer this question, he points to the strength of administrative units during the colonial period which tended to have a self-contained character and which, in the words of Anderson, in themselves “created meaning”. This process of creating meaning occurred above all through the circulation of people, especially colonial civil servants, and documents. A second element was the emergence of creole elites, which in many different ways, created an “American” identity, setting them apart from the Spanish officials. These elements could express themselves through the early importance of print which, already in the late eighteenth century, led to a plurality of independent “American” newspapers. In this review article, the merits of Anderson’s work will be considered and the question will be posed as to what extent we can see specific forms of nation-building in Latin America and, thus, a different social history of Latin American societies.

REASSESSING *IMAGINED COMMUNITIES*

In spite of the importance Anderson gives to Latin America, his chapter on the “creole pioneers” is tantalizingly short and leaves open many questions. This provoked a number of historians to organize a conference in 2000 on the merits of Anderson’s analysis of Latin American nation-building, which in turn has now led to a book consisting of eight essays analysing different aspects of the Latin American nation in the nineteenth century. However, most of the essays are critical of Anderson’s analysis, or only implicitly linked to it, so that they have evolved into independent essays on the history of the Latin American nation. To give just one example: well-known Argentine historian, Tulio Halperín Donghi, concedes that Anderson has found a new way of looking at nation and nationalism, and that his systematic comparative approach has made a contribution to our understanding that is quite independent of the validity of its specific conclusions, but he seriously questions Anderson’s analysis. Echoing Tony Judt’s observation that in the book “metaphorical reach exceeds its historical grasp”, he notes the irony that “so many among Anderson’s admiring and grateful readers regretfully [acknowledge] that in the areas of their own expertise he got almost everything wrong” (p. 33).

Indeed, in the only contribution that directly addresses Anderson’s analysis, François-Xavier Guerra sternly criticizes Anderson’s emphasis on the circulation of colonial bureaucrats and the separation of creoles and Spaniards. Using recent studies that stress family networks linking groups

2. *Ibid.*, p. 50.

in widely different regions, he rejects Anderson's idea that the colonial structures had already inscribed national identities on the Latin American continent. According to Guerra, these social networks were not defined by the boundaries of colonial administration but extended over the entire area of the Spanish American realm. He also slams Anderson's emphasis on print capitalism in the nascent Latin American republics and boldly states that "virtually every step of his argument is false" (p. 5). Writing and printing had traditionally been the prerogative of the colonial powers and their authorities. In addition, there was no explosive growth of the press in Latin America in the late eighteenth century analogous to what occurred in the British colonies, nor were newspapers focused on regional issues, which would point, as Anderson suggests, to something like new national identities. In addition they were no commercial success, and many quickly went out of circulation.

Guerra concludes that the print media expanded and took importance in Spanish America only after the beginning of the independence movement. Independentist, subversive forms of communication occurred in places outside of the domain of writing where politics could be discussed safely: salons, cafés, libraries, and private residences. These were the places where the real debate on political developments took place, but also where private opinions and news were exchanged. "The emergence of new collective identities in the independence era cannot be properly understood without due consideration of the social milieu described here: the salons and other gatherings, the travels of family and friends whose correspondence created long-distance networks of communication" (p. 22). Guerra's insistence on private correspondence as an essential source of news and political debate is echoed by the essay by Sarah Chambers which stresses the importance of non-official channels of communication for many women active in the period of independence.

As already indicated, Anderson's ideas have only superficially, and to a certain extent, negatively informed the contributions in this collection. This makes for a rather disjointed and uneven collection, despite a valiant effort by the editors in their introduction and a number of very interesting individual essays. These essays show how the creation of national identities in Latin America may have been prepared in the late colonial period but basically took place in the long nineteenth century lasting until the first half of the twentieth century, when republican elites, sometimes desperately, tried to convert their national and modernist projects into something akin to a historical reality.

ALTERNATIVE VISIONS ON STATE AND NATIONHOOD

The collection edited by James Dunkerley takes the limitations of Anderson's perspective as a point of departure and sets itself the task

of looking at alternative analytical perspectives on the Latin American nation-states. Doing so, it presents a more straightforward historical and political-economic vision of Latin American history.

The book sets off with a broad comparative essay by Florencia Mallon. Taking Mexico, Peru, and Chile as showcases, she demonstrates how the historical analysis of the state in Latin America has been informed by and structured around present-day developments of the national state. In Peru, the perception of a continuing dualism between *mestizo* and Indian, coast and interior highlands, has determined the historical debate. In Mexico the same could be said about the influence of the Mexican Revolution and the subsequent state-centred process of modernization. In Chile, it was the myth of Chilean exceptionalism and political stability that informed the Chilean historiography.

These specific national characteristics defined the historical debate in these countries until dramatic events provoked new questions and challenged existing historical paradigms. In Peru, the reformist military and the emergence of Sendero Luminoso created such a rupture. In Mexico, it was the massacre of Tlaxtelolco in 1968 and the subsequent crumbling legitimacy of the PRI and its state-centred vision of Mexican society. In Chile, the overthrow of Salvador Allende in 1973 made historians aware of the fact that, in the words of Jocelyn Holt, underneath the exceptional order in Chile “there has always coexisted a history of disorder that threatens to overflow the banks of what had been previously established” (as cited by Mallon, p. 44).

Building on her earlier research on popular nationalism, Mallon looks for the essential factors that determined state–society relations in these three countries, and especially the counter-histories of popular nationalism, “the hidden story of alternative projects of the nation” (p. 53). In a dense and rich essay, she shows how historians tend to be enchanted by ideologies of nationhood, even when they try to formulate alternative visions. The continuing vision of a dualist Peruvian state may be the best example. It has haunted the analysis of Peruvian history since the nineteenth century (and, it may be argued, even before) in studies which tried to vindicate indigenous history. Instead, Mallon makes an emphatic plea for a more regional perspective, in which it is possible to understand internal differences within social groups and to obtain a closer view of local and regional debates on identity and national belonging.

She believes that historians have to deconstruct their conception of the state and, in the process, should look for the fissures and internal differences in a heterogeneous state apparatus, also in the Mexican and Chilean cases. The key problem is that, although the vision of a homogeneous and repressive state may be critiqued, historical actors consistently tend to describe the state in exactly those terms: as a

homogeneous hegemonic monolith, even when, or indeed precisely because, they are opposing repressive policies.

The other essays in this collection demonstrate the richness and relevance of the present-day debate on state and nation in Latin America. At the same time, however, they make clear that we are far away from one generally accepted and to a certain extent paradigmatic approach to the problematic state formation in Latin America. The collection's introduction may announce that a "simple" Weberian approach – centring on the "control of legitimate force within a given territory" – has been its guiding principle, the essays show the dazzling extent and depth of regional variations and the great variety in theoretical perspectives.

Some historical case studies favour a distinct descriptive approach in attempting to understand the development of the state in Uruguay (López-Alvez), Brazil (Topik), Peru (Gootenberg), or Bolivia (Qayum). Others use a more thematic perspective, such as the contributions by Centeno and Deas on the relationship between war and state-formation and McCreery and Lewis, respectively, on state-building in the Brazilian frontier state of Goiás and state expenditure in Argentina. In a thought-provoking comparative essay Guy Thomson confronts state formation and the development of a homogenous national ideology in Mexico and Spain. He points at the interesting paradox that where the state as an organizational institution in Spanish society was generally much stronger than in Mexico, the Mexican elite succeeded much better in forging a fairly homogeneous and generally accepted national ideology that solidified the idea of a Mexican nation.

The most complex essay may well be that by Alan Knight. On the basis of his phenomenal knowledge of Mexican history he develops a long and dense argument that has, before anything, theoretical objectives. Above all, he wishes to unravel the conceptual confusion that is the result of easily applied concepts like nation, state, legitimacy etc. Knight replaces the idea of hegemony by something he calls "state capacity": the ability of the state to affect society by collecting information, to influence people and to control resources. A focus on these three issues may allow historians to measure state performance, but Knight is not too optimistic about it. Historians need to develop an empirical basis to understand the relations between states and their (civil) societies, but he argues that the strength of civil society and its influence on the nation-state is almost impossible to measure. Is a great number of civil associations a sign of a strong civil society or of its fragmentation? And what about authoritarian, undemocratic, or patriarchal associations?

To conceptualize the relationship between the state and civil society, Knight postulates two models: the consensual/inclusionary model, which is based on a dense, Tocquevillian civil society, and a colonial/exclusionary model which functions by isolating or repressing civil society. Both can

generate stable systems of governance, and can even exist side by side. This is for instance the case in Mexico, which Knight therefore labels a schizoid state. This has been such an enduring element of modern Mexican politics that it has all but become a permanent part of Mexican culture. However, Knight concurs with historians like Mallon that the nationalist ideologies which are essential for the longer-term reproduction of the state, originate everywhere in society and that it would be a mistake to see them as the exclusive prerogative of the state.

REPUBLICAN DEMOCRACY AND ASSOCIATIVE LIFE

In his discussion of the weight of civil society and the difficulty of measuring, let alone analysing its influence, Knight refers to the then unpublished work of Carlos Forment. The first results of the research of this Argentine scholar have now been published in the first volume of his *Democracy in Latin America*. On the basis of painstaking research of the printed press that also played such a central role in the ideas of Anderson, Forment tries to assess the Tocquevillian notion of civil society as a conjuncture of civil associations. He is critical about the late twentieth-century literature on democratic transitions that is unable to distinguish civic from market models of democracy. These visions have downplayed the practical importance of associative life, public deliberations, socio-economic equality, and accountability in the workplace, school, and other arenas of public life. Forment, in contrast, intends to understand the daily reality of democracy-making and the emergence of democratic habits in nineteenth-century Latin America. He focuses on democracy as an independent result of the “sovereignty of the people” rather than as a structural by-product of “state-building”.

The point of departure of Forment’s project is the idea that the democratic tradition in nineteenth-century Latin America was far more robust than most scholars have claimed. He supports this claim by counting civil associations and evaluating their political and social consequences. And indeed, his overview is impressive. There is no doubt about the great organizational activity and the large extent of civic action in nineteenth-century Latin America. He shows, for example, that the Lancasterian society of its own accord established hundreds of primary schools in Mexico in the early nineteenth century, providing children from poor, often indigenous families with basic schooling (pp. 110–111). The same could, of course, be said of a multitude of Catholic associations which fostered social networks and took over the basic tasks of the national state. His book rescues a multitude of examples of “democratic”, inclusive behaviour that existed against or alongside the state.

The question that Forment has to ask himself is what all these activities mean in strongly clientelist and patriarchal societies, and how their analysis

can shed light on the development of democracy in different Latin American countries. In this first volume of Forment's project he focuses on Mexico and Peru, two countries that in recent historiography have increasingly been presented as Latin American counterparts. In that context, it is surprising that Forment does not refer to Mallon's influential *Peasant and Nation* (1995), which also compares these two countries. Even more so, because, in spite of different theoretical points of departure, there are some interesting similarities in both comparative endeavours. Both conclude that there have been substantial differences in the processes of state- and nation-building in these two countries; both accept that the Mexican state has been much more successful in its endeavour to create a nation.

In Mexico the creation of these kinds of associations started in the first decades after independence, declined during the crisis years around 1848 when US troops invaded the country, and then sharply rose again. Of course, not all of these associations were very stable, but they demonstrated a strong feeling of civil engagement. They normally had very practical goals, building bridges or schools, dredging irrigation canals, or offering various forms of social assistance. An interesting conclusion emerging from Forment's research is that these associations were far from homogeneous in either the class or ethnic sense. Many associations counted indigenous members, and regularly brought together people of widely different class backgrounds. In addition to being socially inclusive, their systems of governance were usually based on democratic practices. Women played a prominent part in some of these associations. Of course, there were also large differences; some were composed like guilds or had political or ideological purposes and others were clearly religious. They functioned as social and political networks, but also as sources of credit, education, or jobs.

Forment pictures a strongly contrasting image of the Peruvian situation. Here the anti-colonial movement failed to foster a strong and self-conscious society which could convince its citizens to organize associations and so create a civic, democratic tradition. Most existing associations found their origins in the colonial past and they clearly lacked the democratic flavour of their Mexican counterparts. It is interesting to note that some of the most active associations in the early period after independence were urban confraternities which were populated by urban blacks. In the countryside the same was true for the indigenous population. In this early period these religious confraternities stimulated inclusion and democratic social relations. However, Forment suggests that they began to unravel in the 1850s as a result of civil war and economic crisis leading to new elitist and exclusionary practices. Associations of businessmen and entrepreneurs were also scarce and short-lived. The economic crisis prevented the democratic and civil effects of the market to take place in Peru.

In the remainder of his book Forment highlights the different political and civil developments in nineteenth-century Mexico and Peru. The production and circulation of newspapers as “independent” means of communication and the role of civic Catholicism play a central role in his analysis. One of his basic arguments seems to be that the civil associations can be seen as antidotes to the vile and corrupt practices of the political community and the state. Analysing the Mexican situation, he writes: “The majority of Mexicans who were active in public life were far more inclined to practice democracy in civil than in political society. Citizens continued to live with their backs to the state” (p. 154).

POPULAR POLITICS IN MEXICO

It is evident that Forment’s ideas ask for more research and need to be supported by more detailed case studies. The compelling book by Christopher Boyer on agrarian associations in Michoacán, Mexico, may be an example of such a study. Boyer zooms in on the activities of rural people after the Mexican Revolution. He describes how the so-called *campesinos* demonstrated a creative and ideologically flexible reaction to the dramatic transformation of Mexican political discourse. Trying to defend their traditional rights and to secure benefits from the state, they appropriated the revolutionary discourse and established all kinds of agrarian leagues, later combined in the so-called *agrarista* movement. Mediated by what Boyer calls “village revolutionaries”, the rural population became an active agent in the construction of the new Mexican nation.

It may be debated whether it was the specific situation in post-revolutionary Mexico or the changed circumstances in twentieth-century Latin America in general, but these peasants certainly did not live with their back to the state. On the contrary, they appropriated and used the revolutionary rhetoric of citizenship and class to fight their way into the political debate. Doing so, they ran the risk of becoming embroiled in political infighting and hegemonic politics. Boyer (p. 39) writes: “When village revolutionaries encouraged rural people to join political organizations and press for their rights, they got swept up in unionization movements and the ideological debates of their day”. This meant, among other things, that indigenous and local discourses were often replaced by the language of class. In the end, this led to an incorporation of the movement in the hegemonic project of the state.

Boyer’s analysis beautifully supplements Forment’s study, when he shows how this complex interaction with the Mexican state did not silence the peasants in Michoacán but led to new forms of associative life and political struggle. By showing how “*campesino* identity” outlived agrarianism, Boyer draws attention to the historical evolution in the

relations between social movements and associations with Latin American states. When the rural associations were incorporated into the political machinery of the Mexican state, the rural population turned its back on them and started to organize in new, often anti-state movements without, however, relinquishing meaningful parts of the revolutionary rhetoric. “In this way, they rejected the politics of agrarismo without relinquishing their membership in the category of rural people that the revolutionaries had pledged to empower” (p. 44). This process eventually led to the religiously inspired, anti-revolutionary revolution of the *Cristeros* which ravaged the Mexican countryside from 1926 to 1929. With the battle cry “Viva Cristo Rey!” many peasants embraced a different political project under guidance of new leaders, often village priests.

Boyer’s book stresses an important element of social and political activism: the position of social and political brokers. These local leaders, popular intellectuals or village revolutionaries, played an essential role in articulating the relation between rural people and the state. Doing so, they were continuously confronted with the inevitable ambiguities of a position “in between”. Articulating ideas that were still unarticulated, organizing people that were only informally or unconsciously forming a group, educating rural people about the “true” nature of social and political relations, and at the same time taking care that these newly organized groups were heard by the representatives of the state, gave them an ambiguous and precarious position. In the end, only a few managed to maintain this independent position in post-revolutionary Mexico.

Many participated in the populist-socialist project of president Lázaro Cárdenas (1934–1940) and became officials in the regional Revolutionary Labour Confederation (CRMDT). This was a workers’ and peasants’ syndicate that functioned both as an officially sanctioned labour union and as a political machine to drum up popular support. Although this confederation was quite successful in organizing land reform and mobilizing the rural masses, it also incorporated peasant activists in the state apparatus. The tragic saga of the revolution is that many popular leaders eventually turned into the authoritarian state officials that would become so hated by the Mexican population.

EXCLUSION AND CONTESTATION

Although Carlos Forment’s tendency to see the civil associations as signs of a democratic tradition in Latin American societies will strike a sympathetic note with most historians, the problem is to ascertain the representativity of his sources. Forment presents the reader with impressive data and eloquent quotations, but it is not difficult to phantom another book that would highlight the anti-democratic attitudes and (patriarchal) authoritarianism within civil society. This authoritarian,

repressive (or in the words of Knight: “colonial exclusionary”) tradition has often been related to racist and repressive policies towards the indigenous population. This is the theme of Brook Larson’s book, *Trials of Nation Making*, which focuses on the Andean region. It is a handsome, well-written analysis which will find good use in university teaching.

Using her long experience in Bolivian history, Larson describes and analyses the problematic nation-building in the Andean countries after independence upset the colonial relations between creole, *blanco-mestizo* elites, and a large indigenous population. There is nowadays a consensus (that she herself helped to establish) that the independence from Spain in this region was not so much a rupture, but only led to a realignment of racialized colonial relations. This was not a uniform or unambiguous process. New political and economic relations led to fundamental alterations in which continuity and change went hand in hand. Larson (p. 14) observes that elite articulations of liberalism, nationalism, and racism took place in “messy political contexts of rural struggle, market expansion, and political crisis”. The Andean elites were faced with the problem of how to modernize their countries without endangering their dominance over the indigenous majority. In Larson’s words: “The quandary for Andean Creole elites was precisely how to build an apparatus of power that simultaneously incorporated and marginalized peasant political cultures in the forced march to modernity”.

Part of their answer was to maintain stark binary discourses of race and space that tried to secure racial and political order in a dramatically changing society. The glorious indigenous past was used to foster new national identities. This led to a renewed archaeological interest in indigenous ruins in the early nineteenth century and the concomitant neo-Inca revivalism. Larson here links up with Sara Castro-Klarén’s emphasis on the importance of the material remains of the great indigenous cultures for the fostering of new national identities in Latin America. These material remains functioned as a kind of mnemonic devices that were used to shape the national identity of Peru in the nineteenth century. The appropriation of the indigenous heritage would in the twentieth century lead to the *indigenista* movements.

Using the examples of four Andean countries, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, and Bolivia, Larson demonstrates how these general transformations took place within different historical contexts. The Colombian case may be the most interesting for the purpose of this essay, because it stands somewhat apart. Where binary oppositions determined nationalist discourse in the other three countries, in Colombia national ideologies tended to focus on mixing and *mestizaje*. The existence of a relatively large black, Afro-Colombian population and the spatial isolation of the indigenous populations can be mentioned as causes for this difference. This points to the interesting challenges of comparative history, also

highlighted by Florencia Mallon, in which we can discern forms of political and discursive “path-dependency”. As a result of specific historical circumstances, the new republican elites started to discuss the future of their nations in specific terms and conceptions, which in the course of time accounted for the development of specific nationalist discourses of inclusion and exclusion.

The studies reviewed here make clear why the process of nation-building that, according to Anderson, started relatively early, has been so unsuccessful. While Forment uses the contrast between Peru and Mexico to understand the problems of the creation of a Tocquevillian civil and political society, Larson specifically draws attention to the problematic creation of nationhood in countries with indigenous majorities. These books present analytical frameworks that help us to identify and understand the differences and variations within the continent. They empirically demonstrate the differences between specific Latin American countries and clearly demonstrate that contrasting understandings and practices of nationhood continued to exist well into the twentieth century.

CITIZENSHIP AND NATIONAL IDENTITY

In spite of the wealth of insights presented in these books, questions remain as to the interpretation of the different political practices in Latin America and the analytical instruments for understanding them. Every analysis on political ideology and nation-building has to address, inevitably, the question of the relationship between ideology and practice. This is even more true after Benedict Anderson has put the discursive creation of nationhood squarely back at the academic agenda.

While Anderson’s comparative analysis of the invention of nationhood may well be his greatest achievement, he is less explicit about this crucial contrast between ideas and practices. This is clearly visible in his analysis of the Latin American creole pioneers. Anderson (p. 50) defines the crucial question as follows: “Why did such colonial provinces, usually containing a large oppressed, non-Spanish-speaking population, produce creoles who consciously redefined their populations as fellow-nationals?”. This may be a crucial question from the perspective of a general analysis of national ideologies, but from a more specific Latin American point of view the more important question is: how can we explain that in, spite of these early ideologies of *inclusion*, daily practices of *exclusion* have been so obdurate in Latin America, persisting as they have to the present day? And, we may add: what difference have these various ideologies of inclusion made in the historical reality of the Latin American subordinate classes?

The first question is directly linked to the issues of democracy commented upon above. There has been a proverbial gap between political

discourse and practical implementation in Latin America. This may well be the main methodological critique of Forment's analysis. While we may agree that the simple fact of organizing civic associations can be considered a sign of the democratic aspirations of the Latin American populations, the gap between discourse and reality must warn us against a too-optimistic use of written sources of the period. In his description of the Mexican Sociedad Católica, an association founded in 1868, Forment (p. 261) points to the contradiction that its administrative structure was authoritarian, but that its recruitment and admission policies were egalitarian. Elsewhere, he points to the establishment of the Sociedad Amiga de los Indios by Lima's elite in 1866, which had chapters in different provincial cities of Peru. The aim of the organization was to make the public aware of the plight of the native peoples and it was the first association to appeal directly to public opinion to advance the "native cause".

This initiative can be seen as a direct predecessor of the multitude of *indigenista* movements in the first half of the twentieth century which play a major role in Larson's analysis. Often well-meaning intellectuals spoke out for the Indian race in the name of a new nationalism. These ideologies were a direct answer to the imperative need to formulate discourses of inclusion in postcolonial society, or in the cynical words of Larson: coercing Indians into "civilization" and Christianity. If we add "modernity" to this list, we here have the three pillars of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century policies of authoritarian nation-building in Latin America. They were so inextricably interlinked that they are often hardly distinguishable. *El progreso* was considered a holy duty, and national elites did everything to incorporate the popular classes into this project. The latter had the obligation to become modern and civilized, not so much for their own good, but because the modernizing state needed their labour power and (agricultural) production.

Nevertheless, this was only part of the story. There is no doubt that even ill-informed and elitist ideas like *indigenismo* eventually found their way into politics and legislation, and in the end had far-reaching consequences for indigenous society. They created discursive and legal spaces which allowed indigenous leaders to push for new definitions of citizenship and nationhood. Also, there is no doubt about the limited success of state policies and the importance of civil society initiatives. Larson and Mallon demonstrate how the political and economic transformation in Latin American societies was, above all, the result of popular politics and indigenous resistance to state and elite dominance. Boyer shows how local circumstances determined the peasantry's involvement in national politics, while Forment's focus on associative activities in the nineteenth century draws attention to the activities of urban, mostly *mestizo* groups. And, as McCreery's article on Goiás and Gootenberg's on Peru suggest, it is also important to highlight and analyse the ways elites successfully manipu-

lated the power and the symbols of the nation-state to reinforce their own local positions.

All these authors show how nationalism and nationhood are terrains of contestation between civil actors and the state. In this manner, they also concur in their plea for a more integrative approach to state and nation-building in which the state and civil society do not stand opposed, but are seen to be integrated in different and continuously changing ways. They ask for a historical analysis of the interface between state and society, which can account for the ever-changing negotiations in the public sphere. They also warn us against perspectives that depend too much on the state and its institutions and, in doing so, qualify nationalist and state-centred historiographies. In this way, they draw attention to what Mallon called “alternative projects of the nation”. The creation of national identities took place in societal and political arenas where all social groupings played their roles and defended their interests.

However, these insights do not solve the problem of assessing the daily practice and democratic implications of these different societal initiatives and associations. Mirroring the enthusiastic academic interest in new social movements in the 1970s and 1980s, Forment’s analysis seems to imply that the sheer existence of these associations could be considered positive enough in and of itself. This interpretation may be too optimistic. On the one hand, as we have seen, the democratic nature of many societal initiatives may often be questioned. On the other, it is doubtful how relevant many of these short-lived and somewhat idiosyncratic examples of associative activity may have been. It is clear that associations and civil initiatives imply the building of networks and the construction of social capital that may be useful for the democratic development of national societies, but we need more specific analytical categories to judge their historical significance.

The strength of these books lies in their balanced presentation of the varied and often contrasting responses to modernity and nationhood in Latin American history. Benedict Anderson’s work has not so much informed their perspectives, but it has functioned as an impulse for a comparative analysis of the specific idiosyncrasies of Latin American nation-building. It is clear that, unlike Asia and Africa, the contrast between colonial and indigenous systems of thought is not the main point here. In Latin America, the central issue was the interpretation and practical implementation of the nation-state in socially and ethnically divided societies.

The books reviewed here appear to confirm that Latin American political and civic development has been determined by the coexistence and often confrontation of two different ideological and political tendencies, which we could call authoritarian-exclusive and humanist-inclusive. Too often we are confronted with simple assumptions of a

centralist, authoritarian tradition in Latin America. This is not only the case with views that concentrate on a supposed authoritarian, anti-democratic political culture in Latin America, but can also be seen in present-day views on democratic transition or consolidation which tend to see democracy as something inherently new and unknown for Latin America. These approaches may ignore or obscure the democratic and counter-hegemonic tendencies which have existed in Latin American society from the outset.

Forment shows the importance of democratic practices and ideas that emerged in the nineteenth century. Authors like Mallon, Boyer, and Larson do the same in their focus on different forms of popular nationalism and indigenous agency. They show how, from the moment of their inception, the confrontation between authoritarian and democratic political projects has been decisive in shaping the political history of the Latin American republics.