

BOOK REVIEWS

Lorenza B. Fontana, *Recognition Politics: Indigenous Rights and Ethnic Conflict in the Andes*

Cambridge University Press, 2023, pp. xix + 242

Pascal Lupien

Brock University

As Lorenza B. Fontana rightly observes, much of the research on recognition politics in Latin America focuses on the struggles of Indigenous social movements for inclusion, and on the vertical power struggles between Indigenous peoples and ruling elites. Authors conclude that adopting recognition, through constitutional amendments or political settlements, provides benefits to those who have been excluded from economic and political power structures based on ethnic discrimination. Research celebrates a range of important gains for Indigenous communities: from participatory democracy to land redistribution. But most studies stop there, and we know little about the longer-term ‘post-recognition’ impact of these policies.

Fontana’s *Recognition Politics: Indigenous Rights and Ethnic Conflict in the Andes* stands out as an original addition to the scholarship by addressing several understudied themes. First, the book contests the assumption that providing differentiated rights, access and privileges based on ethnicity is a good in and of itself. A central argument, supported by convincing case studies, is that the new generation (1990s–present) of reforms generates conflict between those who are deemed worthy of recognition based on indigeneity, and those who are not. Second, Fontana interrogates essentialist constructs around ethnicity and identity that characterise the claims of many Indigenous organisations, and that are often uncritically accepted by scholars and states. Importantly, the book shines a light on the grievances of non-Indigenous peasants (campesinos), a group that is often ignored by both policy-makers and academics despite the fact they face similar socio-economic challenges. Third, Fontana shifts the focus away from the struggles between marginalised actors and the state to the horizontal conflicts between Indigenous and campesino communities.

In Chapter 1, Fontana develops a useful typology based on the interaction of mechanisms the author calls the ‘means of recognition’ (provisions that differentiate between groups based on supposed ethnic differences and assign collective rights accordingly) and ‘means of redistribution’ (measures that institutionalise the allocation of public goods and resources according to perceived ethnic differences). The categories produced by this typology, which are the basis of the four empirical case-study chapters, allow us to understand the complexity and diversity of recognition conflicts, which involve struggles between competing groups over resources, goods and power. The author convincingly justifies her case selection,

© The Author(s), 2023. Published by Cambridge University Press

arguing that Bolivia, Peru and Colombia differ on a number of variables yet demonstrate a similar pattern of inter-group conflict linked to recognition reforms. Chapter 2 outlines the fluctuating approaches of state actors to incorporating rural sectors as either ethnic minorities or peasants. Chapter 3 builds on previous work but offers an original take on identity, which is key to Fontana's argument. Here, she emphasises its fluid and constructed nature, which has oscillated between an emphasis on ethnicity (indigeneity) and class. These shifts were often driven by a strategic interpretation of the perceived benefits of identifying as one or the other. But Fontana advances the argument by demonstrating that these shifting articulations of identity are related to the inter-group conflicts she documents. Once-fluid identities become institutionalised through the creation of separate, sometimes antagonistic, 'Indigenous' and 'peasant' organisations. As domestic and international institutions adopt recognition policies aimed at Indigenous peoples, and resources are attributed accordingly, competition creates *haves vs. have-nots*.

The four empirical chapters (Chapters 4–7) provide rich detail based on a variety of sources, from archival texts to Fontana's original interview material. The chapters are divided according to the recognition-conflict typology presented in Chapter 1; each uses qualitative data to explore how the 'means of recognition' and 'means of redistribution' based on ethnically defined criteria generate conflict. Chapter 4 concentrates on participation conflicts, or those that revolve around who has access to participatory mechanisms such as FPIC (free, prior and informed consent). A particularly relevant observation is that the criteria for inclusion, which vary among the three countries, all serve to exclude other segments of the rural population who are equally affected by decisions made. Chapter 5 considers social-reproduction conflicts, which encapsulate struggles over land rights and territorial autonomy. Fontana shows how land-reform arrangements based on fuzzy ethnic boundaries have produced new conflicts in areas where communities had previously lived in relative harmony. Chapter 6 examines demographic conflict, which arises due to internal migration and resettlement patterns. Here, too, the recognition framework exacerbates the inevitable conflicts that arise when there is not enough land to satisfy demographic pressures. Chapter 7 deals with access conflict. Fontana criticises some of the basic principles behind bilingual education and race-based affirmative-action programmes, arguing that they are founded on false assumptions of bounded, static identity. For the four types of conflict, she convincingly demonstrates how recognition has produced conflict, drawing on evidence from the three countries.

Important threads that run through these four chapters include the reluctance of Indigenous organisations to 'share' the gains they have made with their non-Indigenous neighbours. In fact, Fontana shows that Indigenous actors often deliberately engage in the politics of exclusion in order to block the expansion of recognition to peasant sectors. Another is the fluid and ambiguous nature of Indigenous identity. In some cases, the indigeneity of one group is contested by another, as in the case of certain lowland groups who do not recognise highland Quechua people as Indigenous. At times, Fontana over-emphasises horizontal power struggles, and recognition as the primary causal factor. She virtually ignores the vertical power dynamics that remain dominant in rural politics. For example, Fontana writes that in Bolivia, 91 per cent of the land is in the hands of large land-owners (p. 128). The land-scarcity problem clearly remains a land-concentration

issue, although the book sometimes gives the impression that conflict is primarily generated by aggressive Indigenous organisations. It would have been useful to explore, for example, how local elites – from landowners to extractive-industry representatives – foster, encourage and manipulate the tensions between Indigenous and peasant communities to compete for the small parcels of ‘available’ land, thus distracting people from the problem of concentration.

In the conclusion, Fontana successfully accomplishes her stated goal of advancing a broader theoretical framework around recognition by situating her work within a larger body of research from the Global South. In sharp contrast to the dominant narrative, Fontana challenges the fundamental logic of recognition, arguing that policies designed to reduce conflict may in fact be cultivating it, as well as widening an inequality gap between ‘ethnic’ and ‘non-ethnic’ rural sectors. But she makes a number of important practical contributions as well. Insisting on the socially constructed nature of identity and ethnic boundaries, she compellingly argues for bringing class analysis back in. Her recommendation to policy-makers – in Latin America and beyond – is to consider ‘levelling up’ the field in order to diminish the emphasis on exclusion and to broaden the redistributive potential of recognition policies to include those who could benefit from them.

Recognition Politics is a valuable addition to the literature and a must-read for students of Indigenous politics in Latin America. The book is characterised by rigorous research, compelling arguments and original theoretical contributions. It challenges us to re-think recognition politics and the policies that flow from these generally lauded reforms. These themes should be of interest to scholars well beyond the Andean region.

doi:10.1017/S0022216X23000767

Pascal Lupien, *Indigenous Civil Society in Latin America: Collective Action in the Digital Age*

University of North Carolina Press, 2023, pp. xii + 372

Lorenza B. Fontana

University of Glasgow

‘An Indigenous person with a smartphone is not Indigenous.’ I heard similar statements several times while working and living in the Andean region. Particularly among certain national elites, but also foreigners, a very stereotypical idea of Indigenous peoples is not uncommon, which is often associated with imaginaries of primitive, exotic and remote alterities. Pascal Lupien’s book, *Indigenous Civil Society in Latin America: Collective Action in the Digital Age*, not only offers evidence that Indigenous peoples and technology are far from incompatible but provides a convincing analytical framework to understand how information and