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### **Review/Reseña**

Erin E. O'Connor, *Gender, Indian, Nation: The Contradictions of Making Ecuador, 1830-1925* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2007).

## **Gender and Ethnicity in the Making of Modern Ecuador**

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Eminent Ecuadorian scholar Frank Salomon once commented that the nineteenth century was the least studied period in the country's history since Europe's arrival almost five hundred years ago. Low literacy rates and highly fragmented state structures resulted in a particularly thin and difficult written record for historical interpretations. In fact, the fifteenth century—the period before the arrival of the Europeans—has been more thoroughly studied than the nineteenth.

Erin O'Connor's new book is a masterful study that significantly fills this gap in the literature. Focusing on the period from independence in 1830 to the implementation of modern state structures with the Juliana Revolution in 1925, O'Connor admirably examines the roles and

intersections of gender and ethnicity in the making of modern Ecuador. How and why, she asks, did Indian problems plague Ecuadorian elites for more than a century? Her highly readable and probing study of the contradictions of elite rule will be of interest to an audience much broader than the small Andean country of Ecuador. This book is an important contribution to our understandings of early nation-state formation in Latin America.

O'Connor introduces her study with the conundrum of how and why Indigenous women are simultaneously central to and marginalized from Indigenous activism in contemporary Ecuador. She argues that in order to understand this paradox, it is necessary to turn to the nineteenth century when these cultural identities and relationships were formed. She divides her study into three periods, with the first period lasting from independence until 1857 when the government abolished tribute payments. Ironically, many Indigenous peoples opposed an end to tribute as it entrenched rather than corrected racial inequalities. In the second period, the conservative government of Gabriel García Moreno initially addressed Indigenous issues, ironically utilizing state structures in a manner that would otherwise be expected of a liberal government. In the end, however, García Moreno failed to address Indigenous marginalization, and their economic situation continued to deteriorate. Finally, after the 1895 Liberal Revolution, liberals promised but failed to incorporate Indigenous peoples into society. Liberals were more interested in undermining the power of the Catholic Church than fighting for Indigenous emancipation. As a result, and again somewhat ironically, liberals excluded Indians as workers rather than including them as equal citizens. Liberal failures led to the 1925 Juliana Revolution that concludes the study.

Throughout the nineteenth century, elites were haunted by what O'Connor terms "the specter of liberal individualism" that replaced colonial corporatism with the ideology of individual equal rights (6). Nevertheless, despite policy differences, elites across this period utilized racial and gender categories to marginalize and exclude Indigenous peoples whom they blamed for holding back development of the country. Any changes in views of Indigenous peoples, O'Connor maintains, had less to do with

liberal or conservative ideologies than with the modernization of the nation state as control passed from local to centralized administration. “Central government patriarchies,” O’Connor observes, “permeated indigenous communities only gradually and unevenly” (116). In brief, the process of nation making modernized patriarchy (22).

All too commonly in the historical literature, scholars employ gender studies as a gloss for a study of women. O’Connor, however, avoids this pitfall as she effectively utilizes gender as a category of analysis to understand nation-state formation. In addition, she intersects gender with the equally important category of ethnicity. As she writes, “gender was an important means through which the inter- and intraethnic struggles associated with nation making played out” (184). Elites manipulated gendered categories to exploit and exclude Indigenous peoples, while at the same time Indigenous peoples utilized these categories to advance their own interests. In the process, O’Connor also avoids the pitfall of victimization that sometimes plagues ethnic studies. Throughout, O’Connor expertly interweaves discussions of race and gender. She notes that in both contemporary policy decisions and in historical discussions the label “women” referred to those from elite white society, and the term Indians only invoked images of men. These categorizations left little space for Indigenous women, who as a result became increasingly marginalized from public discourse and policy decisions. Elites perceived Indigenous women as creating obstacles to modernization, which further led to their disappearance as historical actors. O’Connor’s work makes significant strides in addressing these imbalances which linger on in current historical studies.

Andean studies have long been influenced by concepts of gender complementarity, the idea that men and women occupied separate but largely equal spheres. Increasingly these constructs have come under attack as all too often gender complementarity only seems to provide intellectual justification to maintain highly exploitative patriarchal systems of domination. Reducing women to their domestic sphere while championing a public role for men is neither so equal nor so complementary, but rather a continuation of the same exclusionary social structures. Through her

reading of primary documents and an engagement with the historical literature, O'Connor depicts what she terms "complementary but largely unequal gender relations" (227).

O'Connor portrays a further reduction of gender complementarity and an entrenchment of patriarchal systems as structural changes in the nineteenth century broke up Indigenous communities and forced previously free Indians to positions of contracted labor on haciendas. On landed estates, women lost a significant amount of control and power that they previously enjoyed. As O'Connor notes, the maintenance of hacienda structures "depended as much on gender domination as it did on racial domination" (166). But a shift from free communities to contracted labor on haciendas was particularly rough on Indigenous women. They did not begin to regain a significant voice until the mid-twentieth century when activists such as Dolores Cacuango began to organize hacienda workers in the Ecuadorian Federation of Indians (FEI) to fight for their rights. Throughout this process, distinctly Indigenous gender systems survived, though weakened by the imposition of modernizing state structures.

Indian men did not fare much better than women under this system. Depicted as "niños con barbas," elites perceived Indigenous men as those who physically reached adulthood but forever remained childlike. Particularly under García Moreno's rule, Indigenous men were portrayed as submissive in the public realm but violent in the domestic one. Casting them as helpless children and cruel patriarchs provided justification for their marginalization. O'Connor then asks why there are examples of Indigenous women who embraced these forms of patriarchy. She proceeds to explain that while the government was unlikely to punish domestic violence, Indigenous women feared that elite authority structures would undermine their dignity. Furthermore, women preferred to accept Indigenous forms of patriarchy rather than having to confront more rigid non-Indigenous patriarchies. They consciously made decisions that reflected the contradictions in which they found themselves.

Throughout the book, O'Connor expertly creates a sophisticated but accessible analysis of the interactions of race and gender in Latin America. Unfortunately, the University of Arizona Press has only released this book

in hardcover, which means that the book is somewhat expensive for classroom adoption. Hopefully the press will rectify this problem by quickly releasing a paperback edition, because this book will be a fine addition to courses on gender history, as well as general upper-division classes on Latin American history. *Gender, Indian, Nation* is an important contribution to an understudied field. It is valuable not only for its contributions to gender history, but also to our understanding of ethnicity and state formation.