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## Review/Reseña

Fred Rosen, ed. *Empire and Dissent: The United States and Latin America*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2008.

## Dissenting Empire: From Yesterday, to Today, and Beyond?

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The essays/articles in this fine edited work span a large amount of time and space. Moreover, they confront some of the more important historical issues/controversies of our day, in particular, the use and abuse of power, and resistance to that power. The first sentence of the acknowledgments notes that “[t]his volume originated in a project called ‘Responding to Hegemony: The Dynamics of Social Movements,’ sponsored by the Program on Global Security and Cooperation (GSC) of the Social Science Research Council...” (vii). As this opening sentence indicates, this collection of essays analyzes the very important intersection between two

key issues: how governments extend their power beyond their borders; and how such an extension affects and/or stimulates social movements in the host nations.

The introduction does a serviceable job in introducing the main ideas of the essays/articles in the volume. However, the introduction raises more questions than it answers. It introduces a series of binaries: formal v. informal empire (2); confrontational accommodation v. pragmatic confrontation; dissent from above and below (12); included v. excluded (13); tolerated members of the subaltern (*el indio permitido*) v. those not tolerated (outside of the dominant social system) (14). But, the introduction does not make clear how those binaries will be employed as analytical tools. In addition, vague terms are left undefined: for example “dominance” (5); and a series of words in quotes: “consensus” “efficient market theory” “technical assistance” and “value free” (10). A final undefined term is “civil society” (17). Granted, one reason why the introduction has difficulty in specifically indicating which issues will be highlighted is that the collection of essays, admirably, spans a dizzying array of time periods and countries.

The first part of the book is entitled, “Empire in the Americas: Historical Reflections.” Alan Knight’s characteristically brilliant opening essay brings many of the important issues outlined in the introduction into focus. He presents essentially a primer on imperialism for the modern reader. It is persuasively logical and admirably succinct. The two modalities of imperialism are formal versus informal. Imperialism’s two functions are “engineering” and “defense.” The three mechanisms are political, economic, and cultural. Finally, the ultimate imperialist goals, even as they shift throughout time and circumstance, generally reflect the three mechanisms. Although I would substitute the term “spreading culture/values” for the more antiseptic “engineering,” I think his outline is a very useful introduction to imperialism that clarifies issues that come up in the following essays.

Knight deftly compares the British and American “empires” in Latin America, parsing out important aspects of both along the way. Interestingly he states in his conclusion that the “basis” of U.S. imperialism in Latin America is economic. Knight then intriguingly concludes that “pending a

U.S. economic debacle and/or a sustained European (or Chinese) commercial challenge, it seems likely to stay that way for the foreseeable future” (45). Knight penned these words before the recent financial meltdown on Wall Street (and more broadly in the United States) that we are currently experiencing. Might the present financial crisis be that “economic debacle”? And perhaps the nature of the U.S. informal empire in Latin America will dramatically change in the wake of Wall Street’s collapse?

Dialogue of the deaf. Resistance to the end. These phrases best explain how the European colonial powers during the colonial period, and the Indians, talked past each other with regard to the idea of Indian sovereignty in 18<sup>th</sup> century North America. Gregory Evans Dowd, in a thought-provoking essay, discusses two important moments in the changing relationship between the colonial powers and the Native American peoples. In the first, the period just *before* the American Revolution, although the colonial powers wanted the Native Americans to acknowledge that they were subjects, the indigenous peoples refused to do so. As colonial authority Sir William Johnson noted, the very term “British subjects” would have “startled” the Indians because it was “repugnant to their principles” (60). In the second period, however, just *after* the American Revolution and the new U.S. military’s suppression of Indian uprisings on the western frontier of the new nation, Dowd notes that the Indians gave up their previously-held notion that they were independent of foreign powers—but only after repeated military defeats at the hands of the United States. When the Native Americans agreed to the Treaty of Greenville (1795), they acknowledged that “the Great Spirit gave us this land in common,” acknowledging, in effect, that they were subjects of the United States (68). Some in the United States have been uncomfortable with the idea of their democracy holding subjects with its imperial conquests in the 1898 Spanish-American-Philippines War; Dowd’s essay does a good job at describing the twisted historical roots of how the United States came to hold subjects early in its history.

The critically important 18th century, with the rise of the British Caribbean and the trans-Atlantic nexus, provides the backdrop for John

Richard Oldfield's essay. As a case study of how morality, state power, and economic influence intersect, it proves especially rich. Specifically, Oldfield discusses the burgeoning British slave trade during that century; Britain's subsequent banning of that trade; and its abolition of slavery itself. Noting that the power of altruism and morality rarely move political leaders, Dowd concludes that the American Revolution proved critical in understanding Britain's decision to prohibit the slave trade. Because the Revolution proved such a blow to Britain's imperial ambitions, and revolutionary/reform movements in the Americas were inspired by it, the British did not want to risk another "humiliation in the future" (79).

The essays then move the reader into the twentieth century. As Latin American debt has proven to be one of the more important economic and social issues of our time, Carlos Marichal's essay is inherently significant. Of special importance, he puts the recurring Latin American debt crises in historical context. Noting that debt has been a "key instrument" (91) of the economic growth strategy of many Latin American nations in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and that international investors have purchased a growing chunk of the debt, the resulting debt crises are international in nature. International players, such as the United States, "attempt[ed] to exercise their power over such negotiations." Other key players include the International Monetary Fund and the Inter-American Development Bank (91-92). His main question is how both international actors and governments determine the parameters and outcomes of key debt negotiations. An examination of the Latin American lending booms of the 1970s proves especially prescient as they were a "fundamental antecedent" (96) to the modern financial globalization we find in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Marichal concludes that over time the international financial institutions, and the United States, have exerted more control over the debt negotiations to compel the Latin American nations continue their debt payments, despite the rising social discontent caused by those who bear the social cost of such payments, the working class and poor.

What is democracy? In many respects, this question lies at the heart of the second part of the book, entitled "Empire and Resistance in the Twenty-First Century." Or, more specifically: how can Latin American

governments make democracy more real for the non-elite (i.e., average) Latin American? The question is in one sense a (domestic) political question—"the weakness, corruption and opportunism" of the Mexican government, according to Neil Harvey, spurred the Zapatista movement in Chiapas, Mexico, in the mid -1990s. Yet the question is international in nature, since a number of non-elite Latin Americans view neoliberalism of the 1980s and 1990s—the loosening of restrictions on international trade and investment, and reduced government intervention in the economy more generally—as impoverishing a larger chunk of Latin American society than before. Harvey importantly notes the broader significance of the Indian rebellion in Chiapas by highlighting that in the wake of the Zapatista movement, "other social movements have expressed similar demands for social justice and great participation in decision-making bodies" (119). Thus the stage is set for "the struggle for local and regional spaces of self-government." That stage is constructed by an imperial architect: the result of the North American Free Trade Agreement was to flood Mexico with inexpensive products, in particular foodstuffs, from the United States. Thus came the impoverishment of Mexico's poorer farmers (those in Chiapas are at or near the bottom) because they could not compete with North American agri-business. Harvey succinctly concludes: "[t]he result was another illustration of how Mexico's relationship to empire is shaped primarily by its overdependence on trade with the United States" (125). As empire persists, so will the resistance to it, with the resulting continued social crises in Mexico.

Sacred leaf of the gods or raw material for cocaine? The coca leaf and its conflicting symbolism is a good starting point for understanding indigenous issues and democracy in today's Bolivia, that poor, landlocked Andean nation. Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui has been studying and writing for many years on the problems of poverty and discrimination facing the indigenous peoples in Bolivia. The coca-growers, or *cocaleros*, represent not only people who see the coca leaf as inextricably linked with Bolivian history, but also those who challenge the neoliberal consensus. As such, it is not surprising that one of the Indian organizers of the *cocaleros*, Evo Morales, also galvanized the anti-neoliberal forces in Bolivia in forming the

Movimiento al Socialismo (MAS). Rivera Cusicanqui does a good job describing the dynamic nature of the very definition of who is an Indian. As resistance to neoliberalism increased, those who self-identified themselves as Indian skyrocketed—by the 2001 census, over 62% of Bolivians were considered Indians. (Moreover, Bolivian census-takers abandoned using the methodology of location—which underrepresented Indians—in the 2001 census.) Using this Indian majority as a base, and also reaching out to an amalgam of leftist and reformist parties of many different stripes, Evo (as Morales is known) skillfully reached out to Bolivians of different class backgrounds and ethnic groups in his presidential bids of late. His supporters had grown weary of waiting for the supposed benefits of neoliberalism to “trickle down” to Bolivia’s non-elite sectors. Thus, by winning an impressive 54% of the vote in December 2005, Morales joined Hugo Chávez as a second major South American challenger to the neoliberal consensus. Privatization of state-owned industries would halt. Foreign owners of oil and gas concessions would pay more for the opportunity to pump these resources out of the ground and sell them on world markets. Land reform, appropriating unused land from large landowners and transferring it to the rural poor, would be accelerated.

Parallel to the challenge to neoliberalism, coca-growers in Bolivia also attempted to expand new markets for non-cocaine production. Foodstuffs and ointments using the coca leaf proliferate, as does chewing coca, a time honored practice in Bolivia. Although coca-chewing is associated with campesinos and miners who must work long shifts with few breaks (or food to eat during their breaks), of late the practice is becoming more common in urban areas. The Morales government has encouraged such legal production of different coca-based products, while looking for new international markets for them—which would imply changing the definition, in international fora, of coca leaves as an illicit substance. Meanwhile, the Morales government has continued the anti-narcotics policies of previous Bolivian governments, working with the United States in eradicating coca leaves that are used for the fabrication of cocaine.

Rivera Cusicanqui notes that the rise of the *cocalero* movement spurred a new form of Indian ethnic identity, distinctly different from the

view of the Indian perpetuated by years of rule by mestizo and white rulers. Those rulers wanted the Indians to accept a status Rivera Cusicanqui terms “indio permitido”—an Indian who accepts the “rule of the game” of the “dominant culture,” and that she/he will never be treated as better than a second-class citizen—“preserved in a sort of timeless past for the delights of ecotourism” (154). Instead, Indians who were *cocaleros* formed unions and larger economic and social networks that stretched over vast portions of Bolivia’s territory—the Yungas, the Chapare—and exert political power (at the local and regional level in particular) as well.

Clearly, this newly revitalized Indian ethnic identity has profound implications for Bolivia, the Andes, Latin America, and even the world as a whole; but it is not the end of the story. The author concludes, “[t]he challenge facing the Morales government lies in articulating the full potential of this new politics of identity, demanded by the actors in the coca-leaf market, into a national policy that is both sovereign and capable of gaining supports in the world at large” (159).

In Bolivia’s giant neighbor to its north and east, Brazil, led by Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva (Lula), we find a very different sort of democratic experiment. If the mobilization of social “outsiders” marked the rise of left-wing leaders in Venezuela, Ecuador, and Bolivia, Lula, for his part, was on the other end of the spectrum, a sort of “insider.” Indeed, as Jeffrey W. Rubin notes, Lula led a political party, the Workers’ Party, Partido dos Trabalhadores (PT), with “a long history of internal democracy, connection to social movements, and dedication to an alternative, egalitarian national project” (165). Lula had run for president three times before his 2002 victory. Rubin succinctly sums up the stakes for Lula’s government: “it has put to the test those the claims of those who champion democracy: that democracy can improve people’s lives; that citizenship within political institutions fosters inclusion and well-being; and that nation states can be significant forces for self-government and social justice in today’s globalized world” (164).

“Institutional activism” sums up Lula’s approach. Since Brazilians of (nearly) all social classes and ethnic groups agreed that the national government needed to address the problem of inequality in a nation which

has a distribution of wealth more unequal than almost any other nation in the world, Lula managed to “build into” his government projects to forge a more egalitarian society. Rubin cites examples of “grassroots innovation and institutionalization” (168) that the PT has either spurred on or accommodated. For example, one activist who had spent a lot of time organizing people in the streets became local health officer in a small rural town after PT’s ascension to power. In her new position in government, she managed to improve health care for the poor, isolated, and disadvantaged.

But change has been slow. The PT in power has governed cautiously. Lula has not challenged the strictures of the multinational International Financial Institutions (IFIs), which have put tight bounds on how much egalitarian social change can occur. But Lula’s “playing nice” with the IFIs has garnered him support there, bulwarked by Brazil’s vibrant economy. Perhaps, then, the question is when will Lula use this “political capital” of legitimacy to force wealthier Brazilians to sacrifice some of their wealth in the interests of a more egalitarian nation? Rubin notes that Brazil’s economic success springs from its promise to continue to make payments on its big debt; balancing its budgets; and tamping down inflation. But, to do this, Brazil has maintained a budget surplus greater than that imposed by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and kept interest rates high. Such restrictive economic policies have not made it possible for the PT government to allocate significant amounts of money to achieve improvements in education, health care, poverty alleviation, and land reform, which many in the nation’s poor majority desperately want.

Rubin concludes by noting that the hallmark of the 1980s transitions to democracy in Latin America was “the democratic rights that had been lacking, but recognized no claims to economic well-being or inclusion” (182). Since re-democratization, numerous Latin American social movements have called for such improvements in well-being and the inclusion of the excluded. Indeed, Rubin states, Lula must somehow produce both economic well-being and inclusion for the poor majority. With PT’s ascension to power, there has been a loss of excitement in social movements as they have become, to a degree, institutionalized. At the same time, there has been increasing disenchantment with the political process.

If Lula could somehow breathe life back into both social movements and his government, he could stand a chance at making the promise of a leftist government real for the dispossessed.

We now move from the good boy to the bad boy. While Brazil has studiously maintained the good graces of the IFIs, Argentina defaulted on its large debt—in fact, on the largest debt defaults in history. This massive default was provoked by a severe economic downturn in the late 1990s, with the important context that neoliberal policies in the earlier part of the decade had stripped away parts of the social safety net for poorer Latin Americans. Whereas in Brazil social movements and their leaders chose to work within or with the PT govern, the Argentine default was spurred at least in part by the fear that if debt payments continued, the socially marginalized and downtrodden, bearing the lion's share of the economic costs imposed by the continued debt payments, would rise up and threaten the Argentine state itself. The “political and economic transformation” occasioned by the default, in Daniel A. Cieza's words, is especially noteworthy as during the 1990s the neoliberal Argentine government worked hard to show it was in the good graces of the United States, while the post-default successor governments have distanced themselves from the United States.

Cieza's chapter does a thorough job of showing how Argentina's embracing of neoliberal economic policies led to a troika of economic disasters for the non-elite classes: deindustrialization, dependence on foreign goods, and the weakening of the agricultural sector, at least among smaller producers. Concomitantly, social inequality increased, abetted by the weakening of labor unions. As a result, new social movements sprang up. Even as economic growth figures remained robust, burgeoning protest movements indicated that the lion's share of the wealth promoted by the neoliberal policies flowed to the wealthiest in Argentine society. The *piqueteros*, recently unemployed workers, were representative of these new movements. They blockaded national roads “as a form of pressure and protest” against neoliberal policies such as privatization of public services, and thus higher prices of those services, and cutbacks in subsidies for basic needs, that they perceived worked against their interests (196).

Out of the political chaos spurred by the economic collapse of 1998-2001 rose Néstor Kirchner with a new economic model challenging neoliberalism. His plan entailed “a growth model without having to follow the impositions and monitoring of the IMF” (International Monetary Fund, one the more powerful IFIs) (199). Significantly, the Kirchner government challenged the power of multinational (transnational) companies in Argentina, especially those with holdings in the critically important areas of water, electricity and gas. However, Cieza concludes that Kirchner’s leadership is ominous on some level, a “Caesarist type of leadership—a leadership that places itself above the political parties and relates directly to the electorate” (201). One example of this direct relationship between the government and the people is that the government enjoys the support of many of the new social actors mentioned above, not mediated by the traditional political party system or old-line state institutions in Argentina.

The collection ends with a bang—Hugo Chávez’s Venezuela. What else could provide a more fitting end to a set of essays in which those traditionally subordinate challenge groups/leaders that have traditionally been in the driver’s seat? In the 1980s, most observers would have predicted that Venezuela, with its oil wealth, would have slowly but steadily modernized and been a paragon of Newly-Industrializing-State stability. However, the oil wealth flowed disproportionately to the wealthiest. And, as oil prices plummeted, Venezuela realized the downside of monoculture—over-reliance on one lucrative export. Chávez, in a manner similar to Evo Morales, carefully and skillfully built his political movement on the frustration that neoliberalism had run out of gas. Steve Ellner begins his essay by noting three important aspects of *chavismo*. First, Chávez’s government/movement represents a fascinating intertwining of opposition to the dominant elites in Venezuela and abroad. It is both from “above” (Chávez himself); and from “below”—indeed, social movements helped to propel Chávez to power. Second, social movements in Venezuela promoting leftist, anti-neoliberal change are “horizontally connected, internally democratic, and more loosely structured than political parties and the state” (206). Third, Chávez’s followers have shown resentment not only towards the political party system as a whole, but toward the Fifth Republic

Movement, (MVR), Chávez's original political party. Although at first the MVR had significant say, once Chávez was firmly ensconced in power party leaders made few alliances with the bottom-up social movements that Chávez has championed—and not surprisingly members of the social movements were unhappy with the party's decision to exclude them. With the MVR on the wane, Chávez is not constrained by promises to political parties, even his own. Chávez had used his power to privilege the marginalized in Venezuelan society, going beyond what earlier, 20<sup>th</sup> century, populists did, in particular in the areas of government promotion of small-scale production and land redistribution. Ellner notes the importance of Chávez's government by stating that “[the] Venezuelan experiment speaks directly to the left's attempt to devise a democratic, humanist, anticapitalist model in the aftermath of the demise of the Soviet Union” (223). He also notes its particularity—“[t]he success of Venezuela's emerging model...is contingent on continued high oil prices...” (221). With the recent worldwide economic slump, high oil prices sharply fell; as such, the maintenance of the Venezuelan model is in question.

Empire as a way of life. The Empire strikes back. Back in the late 1970s, prominent radical historian William Appleman Williams, largely responsible for popularizing an imperial analysis of U.S. foreign policy, wrote a book entitled *Empire as a Way of Life* in which he discussed the deep historical roots of the U.S. informal empire. His approach is especially important for two reasons. First, the triumphalism many U.S. officials and citizens felt with the collapse of the Communist bloc. Although it could be concluded that *all* of the world's people *lost* the Cold War, considering the staggering costs it imposed on millions, many in the United States saw the Communist bloc's collapse as proof positive that the West had *won* the Cold War. Second, starting in the new millennium, with President George W. Bush heading up a newly aggressive U.S. foreign policy (primarily in the wake of the 9/11 attacks), top Bush Administration foreign policymakers, largely so called neo-conservatives, chose war in responding to perceived threats in South Asia and the Middle East. In so doing, they have openly discussed what they see as their imperial responsibilities, which they equate with the responsibilities of the United States.

If I had been the editor of the volume under review, I would have included a synthetic essay on how European and U.S. governments in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century used military force to expand their control in Latin America, such as the French in Mexico from 1862-1865 and the various U.S. military incursions in the circum-Caribbean region during the era of the “big stick.” The late 19<sup>th</sup>-early 20<sup>th</sup> period is especially important in that new work on this period has discussed how the various metropolises began to systematically export their culture to the periphery with their military interventions, in particular in the circum-Caribbean. But, no matter. The essays in this book do an excellent job of discussing how imperial expansion and control have, across the centuries, spurred opposition to such power. As such, it behooves students of empire today, and the multi-faceted social movements which oppose it, to carefully study the historical context skillfully and compellingly presented in this fine edited collection.