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A Return to the Village: Community Ethnographies and the Study of Andean Culture in Retrospective

Edited by Francisco Ferreira and Billie Jean Isbell. London, United Kingdom: University of London, Institute for Latin American Studies, 2017. xiii + 301 pp. £ 25.00. ISBN 978-1-908857-24-8.

The editors of this volume invited 9 contributors, authors of ethnographies published between the 1970s and 2000, to write a chapter reassessing their previous work. They asked these contributors to consider their writing in the light of more recent developments in anthropology and changing historical circumstances since their earliest fieldwork in Peru, Ecuador, or Bolivia. The result is a compilation of 8 chapters based on retrospective reflection, preceded by a long introduction by Francisco Ferreira. He began his own fieldwork in 2007, which lends a prospective tinge to his personal overview of the historical situations with which the other contributors had to contend. Ferreira reviews a selection of ethnographies on Peru and, to a lesser extent, Bolivia and Ecuador, claiming that this region constitutes a "core Andean region" (p 5). Two of the book's contributors, Tristan Platt and Enrique Mayer, object to this notion of such a geographically restricted area.

My first reaction to the book's title was to wonder what "community ethnographies" might be. Surely all ethnographies are grounded in some sort of a community? Readers expecting a consideration of community (as developed by, say, Anthony P. Cohen) might well be disappointed. Ferreira provides a tautological definition, stating that "a conventional community ethnography … [is] a monograph based on a single community" (p 41). Apart from Carmen Escalante and Ricardo Valderrama, who seem to accept this, other authors are not entirely comfortable with it. Peter Gose recasts it as "village-study ethnographies," which demonstrate "focused affirmation of locality" (p 115).

The contributors who had already begun their research in Peru when Sendero Luminoso terrorists took up a violent struggle against the Peruvian state were forced to reassess their possibilities for continuing to do fieldwork in the highlands. In 1967, Billie-Jean Isbell started hers in Chuschi, the town targeted by Sendero Luminoso in 1980 when it burned the ballot boxes. These contributors explain how, in their personal trajectories as anthropologists, they were forced to respond to the rising death toll inflicted by terrorists and members of the armed forces, accompanied by massive migration to coastal cities. Gose and Frank Solomon turned to archive work and explain how this change in trajectory helped them later to develop their understanding in relation to their chosen fieldwork locations. This historical background is important too for understanding Escalante and Valderrama's chapter on their joint fieldwork between 1985 and 1989 in the Colca Valley, Peru, with its focus on a notion of sustainability.

In her chapter, Catherine Allen reflexively puts herself into her research, describing her fieldwork in Sonqo, Peru, as a process of developing new habits of listening to people to take heed of ambivalences and skepticism. She provides valuable insights into the length of time required to write well-conceived ethnographies that combine the voices of one's research participants at the same time as developing expressive strategies as an author.

Gose explains how he used his fieldwork in Huaquirca, Peru, to merge the political economy and praxis strands of Marxism with a symbolic and interpretive analysis in the style of Clifford Geertz. He challenges postcolonial theoreticians to recognize fully the role of economics in power relations, thereby unshackling anthropology from serving as "the handmaid of neoliberalism" (p 117). Arguing that mountain spirits are products of an ontological order differing from, but partially connected to, the world modernity has created, he berates recent anthropological texts for the "thinness" of its ethnographic description. He makes a strong case that anthropologists need to explore tensions between nature and culture and not to treat ontological orders as "a static or univocally benign condition" (p 122).

In his chapter, Rudi Colloredo-Mansfield also expresses discomfort over the use of the term "community," explaining how his progression through various stages of higher education enabled him to react to this term in developing his methods for working with people in Ariascu, Ecuador. His argument is cogent: ethnographers should take into account how forms of social organization devised, in this case, for a sewer project, are linked to older ways of doing things, permitting "individuals … to create themselves as the rightful people of a place" (p 167). It resonates with Jorge Cladera's (2014) discussion of *Comunidades Aborígenes* in the Andean highlands of northwest Argentina, whose members belong simultaneously to more than one community and may find it difficult to demonstrate ancestral continuity. Their economic practices are nevertheless based on ways of living in the world connected with the past. This reference demonstrates the value of going beyond a supposedly "core" Andean region as well as supporting Colloredo-Mansfield's observation that community studies are "unfinished business" (p 166).

Salomon recounts how he devised a methodology using "ethnography as the fieldwork of history and myth" in Huarochirí, Peru, which, he explains, was regarded by his contemporaries

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at Cornell University during the 1960s as a *locus classicus* for myth and history but not for ethnographic fieldwork. This decision led to his involvement with people "who don't throw things away" in projects to preserve *khipus* held by different communities and the decisions that have to be taken under "the weight of inheritances."

Platt observes that, in the Andes, the term "community" derives from sixteenth-century Spain. In his chapter, he describes how he came to historicize his anthropological practice, having encountered "the idea of the *ayllu*" (p 203) while a student at Cornell, *ayllu* being a complex native term sometimes translated as "community" in European languages. He expands the idea in an examination of changing notions of temporality and periodization.

In the final chapter, Mayer demonstrates how he used maps in his fieldwork to highlight variation in economic production at household and community levels. While studying Laraos, Peru, he witnessed change through time, from communal to private systems of agriculture and, 50 years later, back to a more communal organization of labor. He draws attention to a characteristic of fieldwork, in the process of which ethnographers learn from their research participants.

The authors of these chapters vary in the extent to which they critically reflect on their anthropological practice. They do so from different epistemic foundations and from a deep commitment to a particular place in the Andes. That is a strength of the book, and the contributors provide vivid insights into fieldwork and the process of crafting written texts. Hence this compilation serves as an important source for students at undergraduate and postgraduate levels.

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