

## Neoliberal Multiculturalism and Indigenous Movements

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### **Más que un Indio = More than an Indian: Racial Ambivalence and Neoliberal**

**Multiculturalism in Guatemala.** By Charles R. Hale. Santa Fe: School of American Research Press, 2006. Pp. xii + 292. \$34.05 paper.

### **The Stroessner Regime and Indigenous Resistance in Paraguay.** By René D. Harder Horst.

Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2007. Pp. xi + 224. \$50.05 cloth.

### **Who Defines Indigenous?: Identities, Development, Intellectuals, and the State in Northern**

**Mexico.** By Carmen Martínez Novo. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2006.

Pp. ix + 187. \$23.95 paper.

### **Now We Are Citizens: Indigenous Politics in Postmulticultural Bolivia.** By Nancy Grey

Postero. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007. Pp. xvi + 294. \$26.05 paper.

The four books under review address several of the most compelling issues that have arisen following the democratic transitions of the 1980s and 1990s in Latin American countries with indigenous populations. The main concerns shared by the authors, all anthropologists, are indigenous mobilizing, indigenous-state relations, and official multiculturalism. The reforms that sought to bring marginalized indigenous populations into the political process receive particular attention. The paradox of neoliberal multiculturalism, according to Charles R. Hale, “is that a progressive response to past societal ills has a menacing potential to perpetuate the problem in a new guise” (12). The reforms “intended to heal the rift between the state and the populace,”

writes Nancy Grey Postero (220), did not work as planned, and these books seek to understand why. Although the books address a number of other topics, I will focus on how they deal with indigenous organizing, neoliberal ideologies and policies, democratization, and the role played by structural racism. The differences between the books are substantial, due to different research sites and the varying interests, methodologies, and scope of research of the authors.

Wanting to do research that would benefit Guatemala's indigenous communities, Hale queried his activist Maya friends about what kind of investigation would be most helpful. The response was clear: study nonindigenous Guatemalans (known as *ladinos*) and how they feel about Maya activism in particular and, more generally, about race, ethnicity, and class. Hale and his family lived in the provincial city of Chimaltenango for two years. His roughly 150 interviews plus many informal conversations revealed deep anxieties about Maya ascendancy, a "racial ambivalence" that is the central concept of his study. It is best expressed as a paradox: "the newfound affirmation that Mayas and ladinos are equal is both constitutive of, and a constant threat to, the dominant racial order in the making" (218). Hale asks why racial hierarchy remains virtually unchanged for the vast majority of Guatemalans, despite a formidable change that affirms indigenous people as equals, and respects and celebrates indigenous culture (216). Clearly, the "image of gradual progress in Guatemala . . . toward intercultural equality" (44) does not reflect reality. Guatemala's recent emergence from a civil war that resulted in 200,000 deaths, mostly indigenous, and a much greater number of refugees forms the chilling backdrop to his study. The book was simultaneously published in Spanish in Guatemala.

How Paraguay's seventeen indigenous tribes began to organize and ultimately formed a national movement has received relatively little scholarly attention. René D. Harder Horst's book represents a valuable contribution for this reason alone. Beginning with the colonial era and

covering the entire country, Horst ultimately focuses on Alfredo Stroessner's brutally repressive dictatorship, the longest in the hemisphere (1954-89). A crucial theme within this narrative is the profound influence that religious institutions—primarily the Catholic church, but also Protestant missionaries and Mennonite settlers—had on indigenous communities. The Church's transition from reactionary and regime-supporting to pro-indigenous and anti-government makes for a fascinating story. Liberation theology, Vatican II (1962-65), and the Medellín conference (1968) all contributed to this transformation, along with the rise of global discourses of multiculturalism and growing exasperation with the Stroessner regime. Among the ironies that Horst describes is that in some cases religious conversion strengthened language retention and the resolve of some tribes to withstand pressures to assimilate. **[It would help to clarify the links between the statements that follow to give your narrative more fluidity and coherence]** Horst discusses case after case of ranchers and developers trying every trick in the book to evict Indians from their ancestral lands, with corrupt government agents colluding every step of the way, **and of course** any organized resistance on the part of Indians or their allies was severely suppressed. In one of several international campaigns against the Stroessner regime, Horst writes, well-intentioned advocates knowingly made false statements to the effect that the government had explicit genocidal policies, even though there was no evidence. That the state did not have an explicit set of directives does not mean that a de facto policy was not in place, one that functioned rather efficiently much of the time. Ultimately, the rise of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and pan-indigenous organizing, along with increased international interest in indigenous rights, helped to undermine the regime's public support, and a new constitution with a chapter on native rights was signed in 1992.

In contrast to the broad, diachronic focus of Horst, Carmen Martínez Novo examines the

experiences that migrant Mixtecs from Oaxaca had working as day laborers for a transnational agribusiness company in Baja California, and also the nonindigenous people involved: federal and regional government agents, NGO employees, merchants, ranchers, and social scientists. She describes the development of a perverse multiculturalism, in which government actors interested in attracting global capital in effect colluded with the company to control costs. The substandard benefits and lower wages received by migrants were justified, according to the company, because, as *indios*, they did not need anything better. Minimal medical services were sufficient, for *indios* preferred their own traditional medicine. Child laborers? Not a problem, it was part of their culture. *Indios* were used to living in huts with dirt floors and no running water. Docile and irrational, they would never complain about their treatment, and so any organized protests were obviously the work of “outside agitators” (43-44). Of course, virtually all colonial labor extraction projects offer such convenient rationalizations. What is newsworthy here is that the neoliberal state worked to fashion indigenous identities suitable for insertion into transnational business in order to create a flexible workforce entitled to far fewer protections than under corporatist regimes.

The migrants in question themselves rejected indigenous identity. It is understandable, Martínez Novo argues, that when an indigenous community sees no benefit in maintaining its culture, it will work to ease daily racist assaults by assimilating as much as possible. But regardless of these laborers’ desires, they remained indigenous by state fiat. Their children were taught about their indigeneity in school—to be better able to withstand the invasion of “North American cultural elements” (83). Martínez Novo analyzes the paternalism behind this type of cultural project, the paternalism that she encountered while working with a local NGO, and the paternalistic justifications behind steps taken to reduce the economic threat posed by indigenous

women street vendors in Tijuana. Mainstream culture and gender norms were deployed by **formal sector merchants** to “exclude indigenous women from economic opportunities in the border economy” (17). Clearly, “modernity” does not inevitably dissolve caste-like social relations to produce “modern” class-based ones (52), particularly in an agroexport sector “characterized by internationally imposed regressive economic policies” (10).

Postero similarly offers a tightly-focused case study, examining the impact of legislative reforms on urban lowland Guaraní in eastern Bolivia’s Santa Cruz department. These reforms established collective ownership of territories and intercultural education, employing a rhetoric of inclusion and emphasizing participation, citizenship, and local democracy (124). Postero’s vantage point in a specific urban community enabled her to view Bolivian neoliberalism from below and to write an absorbing ethnography of reforms in action. She documents the emergence of an audit-culture mentality, seen by its promoters (the state and NGOs) as crucial to building civil society. This entailed the adoption of technocratic and “universalist” dispositions, and also workshops to show Guaraní how to use the new laws to further their goals.

Particularly important was a land conflict that brought a crisis of leadership to Postero’s field site and occasioned debates about what it meant to “be Guaraní,” and about the viability of traditional forms of land tenure (90). Contradictory notions about land as commodity versus land as social relations complicated matters, as did the fact that registering land titles became nearly impossible due to corruption, bribes, a lack of transparency, and minimum enforcement. As often happens, the crisis revealed a great deal about how the system was supposed to work, and why it didn’t. The reforms intended finally to permit political participation by the approximately 60% of Bolivia’s population heretofore excluded “reproduced the illness they claimed to cure” (124). Municipalities “became the site of expanded patronage, clientelism, and corruption” (217), and

the law's main effect was "to increase the power of traditional political parties and the elites who controlled them" (142). "[T]he political technologies that were at play in the implementation of the law reinforced the underlying racist exclusions that had kept indigenous people from participating in the state" (138). Implementation of the reforms in fact fragmented indigenous organizations and supported the *status quo ante*.

On a more upbeat note, Postero also describes "a new and more powerful protagonism" achieved through conflictive mobilizations and Indians' entry into electoral politics (218). This protagonism "both incorporates and challenges the underlying philosophies of neoliberalism" (18), and ushered in a "strikingly new social formation" that Postero terms "postmulticultural citizenship." During the "gas war" and the "water war," rather than basing demands on class or race, Indians protested on behalf of "the Bolivian people" (4). Articulating their demands in terms of citizens' rights hammered home the message that all marginalized Bolivians are opposed to neoliberalism and their continuing exclusion from the political process (221).

### **The Proper Location of Indigenous Citizens in the Neoliberal Multicultural State**

Hale analyzes neoliberalism as processes of subject formation "that shape and transform individual subjects and collectivities, as well as economies" (20). While affirming cultural rights and endorsing the principle of equality, neoliberal ideology remakes societies "with ever more embedded and resilient forms of racial hierarchy" (20), including the dichotomy between two ways of being Indian. Hale's Ladino interviewees would not make sweeping statements about Indian inferiority, but instead "carefully drawn distinctions between worthy and unworthy Indians, authorized and prohibited ways of being Indian" (20). In this paradigm, the authorized Indian (*el indio permitido*) "passed the test of modernity, substituted 'proposal' for 'protest,' and has learned to be both authentic and fully conversant with the dominant milieu." Its Other, the

insurrectionary Indian, is instead “unruly, vindictive, and prone to conflict” (230).

All four books reviewed here address state attitudes toward assimilation, including the conditions under which native peoples want to be assimilated. Hale outlines the exclusionary and assimilationist state policies that preceded today’s version, a “disciplinary assimilation” **that is intended by its architects** to lead to a “Guatemala without ‘Indians or ladinos’—a classic assimilationist vision that implicitly favors people of the dominant culture” (73). He also discusses how various groups have sought to keep progressive reforms from leading to “ladinoization.” In Paraguay, resistance to forced integration policies became a means of criticizing the state. Bolivian Guaraní also faced dilemmas in trying to maintain their indigenesness: “What does multiculturalism mean when ‘traditional indigenous’ lifestyles are recognized by the constitution but swallowed up by the economic realities of rapid urbanization or resource exploitation?” (**Postero** 8). We saw that in Baja California the naturalized indigenous inequality promoted by the state benefited transnational capital. This local disapproval of Mixtec laborers’ attempts to assimilate went against Mexican federal guidelines for assessing indigeneity because, if Indians leave their traditional territory or lose their language, they are seen to be of indigenous descent, but are no longer indigenous themselves (**Martínez Novo** 7).

Until the 1960s, Paraguay did not really have a place for its indigenous citizens. They were simply a problem needing a solution, which, for the Stroessner regime, was forced assimilation or extermination. In contrast, in Bolivia, possession of a national identification card “promised a radical break with the past and a wholly new relation with the state” (**Postero** 9). Postero unpacks the layers of contradictions contained in the expectation that traditional models of leadership would blend seamlessly with neoliberal emphases on participation, accountability, and Western-style democracy (e.g., New England style town meeting and majority rule voting).

As in Hale's dichotomy between two ways of being Indian, she describes how one leader had to tack back and forth between styles, assuming the roles of warrior leader, local politician, and corporate administrator (110). The reforms required Guaraní leaders to be able "to work well in the bureaucratic world of city administration and municipal elections" (152), but few leaders had the technical abilities or education to fulfill these roles. Furthermore, the technical knowledge required of them was "at odds with the constitutionally recognized *usos y costumbres*," the traditional customs and practices specific to each group (154). Western know-how was needed if organizations were to tap into NGO funding opportunities, and older Guaraní leaders conceded that they could not keep up with this new requirement. However, younger leaders able to manage the new rules faced accusations of having become too acculturated and distant from their roots. Suspicions, sometimes well founded, periodically arose as to whether leaders were in some politician's back pocket or actually scamming their communities, while pretending to secure land titles.

### **The Relationship Between Indigeness and National Identity**

During the colonial era, indigenous uprisings helped to defeat the crown throughout Latin America, and today the leaders of these uprisings symbolize the fight for independence in the form of statues in town plazas and as protagonists in textbooks, popular folklore, and narratives offered by guides at archaeological sites. Paraguay encounters difficulties here because all of its pre-contact Indians were nomadic hunter-gatherers, a lifestyle at odds with Western notions of heroic warrior chieftains. Nevertheless, Paraguay is officially bilingual: Guaraní, the language spoken by a majority of its citizens and a symbol of nationalism and resistance during the War of Triple Alliance, distinguishes Paraguayans from powerful neighbors Brazil and Argentina. One may contrast this with Mexico, where northern tribes like the Tarahumara were never vanquished



and continue to partake in a positively valenced imaginary of the “noble savage,” whereas, in the same region, migrant Mixtecs suffer by comparison, as Martinez Novo says, for they find themselves relegated to the status of “dirty and poor,” ignoble savages (21).

Several of Hale’s interviewees spoke of ladino “identity-lessness”: while Mayas have their own culture, the basic communicative task of the category of ladino is to signal a stark dichotomy from being Indian, a nonindigenusness (114). One interviewee commented: “we have neither race nor culture” (126), and another said “for us, it is only imitation” (114). Hale concludes: “[t]he self-assured, historically grounded, culturally rich, and yet also modern contents of Maya identity begin to make ladinos, by contrast, appear to be without identity” (158). He sees the imaginary of the insurrectionary Indian stepping in at this point, solidifying the fragile persona of the ladino. It should be seen as “a flashpoint . . . that jumps suddenly to mind, and in so doing summarizes and reiterates what it means to be ladino” (161).

### **Indigenous Mobilizing**

Often naïve at the beginning, indigenous activists can evolve into confident leaders, sophisticated in the ways of the white man’s world. For example, Paraguayan Indians learned to play religious missions against each other. Activists also learned to wield a pan-indigenous discourse—national and international—effectively, as well as how to attract media attention. As is true throughout Latin America, none of the mobilizations discussed in these books espoused a separatist agenda. Rather, a major goal was recognition, which requires a relationship with the apparatus of the state.<sup>1</sup> In Bolivia, indigenous activists linked specifically ethnic demands to a

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<sup>1</sup> See Donna Lee Van Cott, *The Friendly Liquidation of the Past: The Politics of Diversity in Latin America*. (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press 2000).

renewed populist notion of the nation (Postero 5). Horst describes how Paraguay's natives "worked extensively within the state's political structures to force their way onto the national stage" (136). Hale perceives an impasse in the Maya movement: Ladino responses have turned "preemptive," and powerful institutions "well beyond Guatemala are finding ways to contain cultural rights activism through appropriation rather than suppression" (31). As proponents of neoliberal multiculturalism "become ever more deeply invested in shaping cultural rights rather than denying them, this shift helps explain the impasse that many indigenous rights movements now confront" (37).

Hale, Postero, and Horst discuss the Left's **problematic** response to official multiculturalism and indigenous activism. Hale's account both of the racism experienced by Mayan guerrillas and, more generally, of the relationship between the revolutionary Left and the developing Mayanista movement during and after civil war in Guatemala is thought-provoking, as is his analysis of competing narratives about Maya participation in the conflict.

Movement strategies come in assorted shapes and sizes. One involves deploying the ubiquitous discourse that links indigenous identity, human rights, and democracy. Another, the politics of recognition, requires figuring out how to capitalize politically on indigeneity—for example, by making the indigenous identity of protesters apparent during strikes and marches. **Performing indigeneity can take varied forms, a case in point being soccer matches played for white audiences in Paraguay (Horst 43). Postero cites a "so-called traditional Guaraní leadership role [enacted] for the benefit of the outside" (112). The organizing carried out in Paraguay illustrates the politics of embarrassment, as well as strategic accommodation and dissembling. Another strategy involves turning to state institutions such as the courts; Horst and Postero provide examples, as well as discuss indigenous participation in political parties. Another**

**strategy, used throughout Latin America, is public protest—takeovers, blockades, strikes, and mass marches intended to pressure governments to enter into negotiations over demands heretofore ignored. The language of rights claims used during these protests does not always demand respect for indigenous rights:** on one occasion Paraguayan Indians instead protested that their rights as nationals were abused (Horst 127). A final strategy mentioned in all four books is the argument that native peoples deserve better treatment because of their importance to national history, identity, and culture.

### **Pressures from the Exterior**

The rise in international discourses of various kinds of rights—indigenous, human, citizen—has played an important role in Latin American indigenous organizing, as have the treaties and covenants to which Latin American countries are signatories. Also important are international NGO funding and “a global discourse that made ‘indigenesness’ and indigenous rights central tropes of social movement organizing in the 1990s” (Postero 5). The environmental movement has played a supporting role in some places, and the international indigenous movement has been front and center stage almost everywhere.

The legacy of **the** Cold War shaped U.S. efforts with respect to indigenous communities in the region prior to the democratic transition. These efforts’ **results** ranged from bad (various mid-century development initiatives in Paraguay) to catastrophic (in Guatemala). Several more recent international initiatives have had positive effects, as when accusations of genocide in Paraguay led to hearings by the U.S. Senate and subsequent termination of aid. World Bank policies have begun to support indigenous claims as well. Note, however, Hale’s comment that, although the World Bank supports indigenous rights, it promotes economic policies “that deepen indigenous structural poverty and economic misery” (37), an opinion shared by Postero (190).

Indigenous resistance has been intense to more recent U.S. pressures, for example, in regard to a Latin American Free Trade agreement and campaigns to eradicate coca.

### **Ethnoracial Theory**

Current theoretical models of identity as contingent, dynamic, multi-factorial, “lived,” and deeply felt appear in these books. For example, Postero states that “indigenusness—like any identity—is not an uncontested category of domination, but a contingent category negotiated by individual and collective subjects” (11). The issue of *mestizaje* (mixing races) also appears in all four books. In Paraguay, proponents championed a superior mestizo race, similar to notions in Mexico and Peru about a *raza cósmica* (cosmic race). Bolivia, in contrast, has retained strong boundaries between “white” and “Indian” even after the 1952 revolution’s legal erasure of all ethnic terminology. Hale explores the emotional side of identity construction and maintenance, arguing that scholars, himself included, have neglected this aspect. All four authors examine how ethnoracial identity intersects with other identity components such as gender and social class. For example, one of Martínez Novo’s interviewees stated that a middle-class Indian could not exist in Mexico (86).

Racist ideologies are also prevalent in all four countries considered in these works. They appear on almost every page of Horst’s account. We have seen how Bolivian reforms “did not substantially alter the racialized power structures favoring the elite” (Postero 225). We have also seen that most of Hale’s ladino interviewees did not want to see themselves as old-style racists, and recognized white privilege for what it was. However, they did not want to give this privilege up and justified this stand by continuing to see indigenous people as inferior. Guatemalan race terminology itself is revealing: the seemingly simple question of whether to refer to oneself as ladino or mestizo is in fact quite complex and politicized. Furthermore, Hale notes, “[a]lthough

*mistado* and *mestizo* sound like synonyms [since both translate as “mixed”], they key into distinct ideological precepts,” *mistado* highlighting “an infelicitous mixture of starkly different racial types” (172). Hale’s analysis of why complaints about Maya reverse racism appear so frequently is superb, as are his discussions of structural racism, racist liberalism, and ethnicity theory. He is the only author of the four to discuss the links between racism and sexuality. Many ladinos intensely resent the international community’s funding of the Maya movement, with one telling Hale that international donors support organizations that “want to wipe us out” (142). But there is a lack of concrete evidence of the inevitability and imminence of “insurrectional Indians” organizing and going on rampages, burning houses, killing the men, and taking the women as wives. Hale feels that the widespread political imaginary to this effect is inspired “by acts that call ladino people’s relations of racial dominance with Indians into question” (139). It is mind-boggling to read very fleshed-out scripts of such fantasized and bloody Maya uprisings. In Baja California, Martínez Novo also encountered widespread fear of an indigenous uprising “that would replicate ongoing armed struggles in the southern states of Chiapas and Guerrero” (31).

Hale’s account is the most theoretical of the four by far. Postero’s book is strong as well, citing the appropriate literature and using it judiciously. Martínez Novo also engages the relevant theory. Regrettably, to a large extent Horst relegates what theory there is to the endnotes.

## **Writing**

As anthropologists, all four authors are understandably mindful of the effects of their own roles as actors and writers. Hale’s account is the most self-reflexive; some of his comments about himself are highly critical, and none is self-indulgent. He inserts himself into the narrative only when necessary, commenting, for example, on the effects that his white “gringo” status had on his interactions. Postero’s reflexivity strikes just the right chord—her concise comments about

herself are deftly woven into the narrative and come at just the right moment. Particularly striking is the discussion of how she gathered material from opposing sides during the land dispute. Martínez Novo is also self-reflexive, for example, telling us about instances when she felt her Spanish identity influenced interactions. But in contrast to Hale and Postero, Martínez Novo at times comes across as self-righteous. True, she is talking with people who are certainly not interested in advancing the well-being of Mixtec migrants, and a major part of the book documents the negative consequences of the actions of company management, ranchers, and government agents. However, Hale is also studying a nonindigenous sector whose relationship with indigenous Guatemalans is deeply problematic. Yet he does not come across this way, even though he presents fierce condemnations of racism and of the self-serving rubbish to which he was subjected. Horst tells us virtually nothing about himself or his fieldwork.

Hale's book is superbly written, at times even gripping. Postero presents a very readable account of a very disheartening situation. Horst's writing is serviceable but at times pedestrian. Martínez Novo's book is also well written, despite its inattention to numerous redundancies and some misspellings and *faux amis*.

## **Conclusions**

Because of space limitations my final comments are confined to two subjects: neoliberal forms of democratization and structural racism.

Constitutional reforms have had contradictory effects on Latin American indigenous people. Postero notes that practices that give equal representation to all citizens "make the erroneous assumption that all citizens have equal power and abilities to articulate their interests" (158). Where marked inequalities exist between groups, "universalist" citizenship practices tend to reinforce the values and power of the dominant group (158). Postero cites scholars who argue

that liberal citizenship is “a product of bourgeois society underlain by inherent exclusions of race, class, and gender” (222). Recognizing cultural pluralism and promoting tolerance of difference in a managed multiculturalism are insufficient if there is little lasting change for the dominated group (15). Respect for native peoples’ civil rights, and recognition of their ethnic identities, may not matter “if they cannot overcome unequal land distribution, unfair labor exploitation, and overarching poverty” (161). The Bolivian case demonstrates that successful neoliberal subjects must govern themselves “in accordance with the logic of globalized capitalism” (16). But poor Bolivians, indigenous and not, resist these requirements and demand “a democratic government designed by the people themselves, which will go beyond the limited notions of citizenship found in neoliberal multiculturalism” (225).

A point made by Hale, Martínez Novo, and Postero is that globalization does not inevitably entail a weakening of the state. Bolivian neoliberalism was intended as a state-*building* project, and while some segments of the state are minimized, “the repressive apparatus of the state is ever more present . . . to defend the property rights of those who control the market” (Postero 211). In similar fashion, Martínez Novo observes that deploying the ideal of “citizenship rather than an ethnoracial discourse in Baja California has not entailed citizenship rights” (52). Mexico’s construction of a “hollowed-out ethnicity” attractive to global capital in no way threatens its nationalist project (86). Clearly, we must rethink the notion that modernity inevitably goes hand-in-hand with greater democratization in Latin American societies (52).

Racism is found, of course, throughout Latin America, and takes many insidious forms. All four books demonstrate that “the central distinction that has determined political inclusion is race” (Postero 224). We saw that Paraguayan Indians suffered appalling abuse, and the racism elicited from ladino informants by Hale is extremely disturbing. One discourse about Indians

circulating in Bolivia speaks of neoliberal subjects responsible for their own governing, whereas another reminds those same subjects that they are “lazy Indians” (Postero 187). Baja Californian elites have “maintained the racial distinctions that undergirded efforts to stratify and control labor” (Martínez Novo 60), such that in some cases race must be interpreted “as a relationship to the means of production” (33). Despite the Maya movement’s successes, Hale is not sanguine about the possibility of eliminating racism in Guatemala anytime soon. As accusations of reverse racism and paranoid fantasies of race war attest, changes up to now have produced an image in ladino minds of a “momentous inversion” in Guatemalan social relations (129). Hale foresees a “new ladino hegemony” that, while conceding formal equality, continues the discourse of reverse racism and repression. In fact, Hale contends, “the rise of official multiculturalism, paradoxically enough, has made racial hierarchy more resilient” (210). We must conclude, with Postero, that race and ethnicity “are part of technologies of domination, especially within the context of state formation” (10), and that discourses of racism and class continue processes that maintain or increase “social instability, pauperization, and the escalation of inequalities” (190).