

## Culture



**Gavin SMITH, *Livelihood and Resistance: Peasants and the Politics of Land in Peru*, Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1990. 293 pages, \$38.00 (cloth)**

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I was sorry to see that Buckley missed Joan Ryan's *Wall of Words: The Betrayal of the Urban Indian* (Peter Martin, 1978), Arthur K. Davis' *Edging into the Mainstream: Urban Indians in Saskatchewan* (Western Washington State College, 1967), Peter Douglas Elias' *Metropolis and Hinterland in Northern Manitoba* (Manitoba Museum of Man and Nature, 1975), and Peter Worsely's "Bureaucracy and Decolonization: Democracy from the Top" (1965).

One statement is clearly wrong. When discussing the prairie Indians struggle against the Department's plan for settling them on reserves Buckley says, "on the other side, the conquered people started from a position of weakness" (p. 39). None of the prairie Indian peoples were ever conquered or defeated. Some Indian and Metis *individuals* were jailed and some were executed, but most of the Indian peoples of the now-prairie provinces were not involved in the 1885 rebellion, and none of them, as peoples, were conquered. Indians sometimes feel that the whitemen *think* that the Indian nations are conquered peoples, but *they* know they are not. The Bloods are a proud people, not a conquered people. When they again have self-government, when they have an independent fiscal relationship to INAC, when they settle "the Big Claim", they will not be getting charity as a defeated people. The closest they will come to defeat might well be in the future, at their own hands; if they cannot create a sober and caring community, educate their children, and find them jobs. This point should be clear, the prairie peoples have not been victims of conquest but the objects of colonization. There's a big difference.

Gavin SMITH, *Livelihood and Resistance: Peasants and the Politics of Land in Peru*, Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1990. 293 pages, \$38.00 (cloth).

By Christiane Paponnet-Cantat

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The issue of history, culture and consciousness is of growing concern in studies on agrarian conflicts. Gavin Smith's *Livelihood and Resistance: Peasants and the Politics of Land in Peru* throws new light on this question and successfully demonstrates the value of taking local culture and initiatives as the starting points for an understanding of rural conflict and political practice among peasants.

Focusing on the case study of Huasicancha, a Peruvian highland community, Smith explores the connection existing between the political mobilization of peasants and their daily struggle for a livelihood. In particular, he examines the ways in which the specificity of local historical experience combined with the properties of domestic production determine the form of Andean resistance. Professor Smith locates political engagement in contentiousness which gives rise to a heightened internal discourse centered around the peasantry's perpetual need for land.

In this study the notion of culture and its relation to rebellion are re-examined. Smith calls for a recognition of the specificity of local culture and its role in feeding an ideology of opposition to a dominant order. Culture undergoes constant transformation. It is never fully formed but comes into being at historically specific times to turn into an instrument for action. Culture, in this sense, is often oppositional. It is conceived as a space which coalesces around the structural requirements of certain forms of production and the historical experience of political engagement. The momentum generated within that space, where memory is transformed into consciousness through the dynamic properties inherent in relations of production, becomes the source of meaning for political engagement. The author shows that oppositional culture is not distinct from class consciousness, but an expression of it. Smith expresses this insight when he states "an understanding of the specificity of cultures of opposition is an essential part of class analysis" (p 236).

Smith's approach thus reflects the intrinsic connection between culture and consciousness. These are analytically inseparable concepts which are closely related to contemporary practices and past experiences. The historical continuity of Huasicancha as a distinct social and cultural unit is drawn from its active tradition of resistance. The peasants' past history of engagement in local insurgency has provided them with their own notion of place in the historical process. This historical engagement is not just recorded in memory, but it also has practical uses. It provides native people with crucial material and personal resources fundamentally linked to their daily struggle for a livelihood.

Consequently, this work shows that past political experience acts as an indigenous mode of consciousness. The past sheds meaning on the ways people engage in political activity. It clarifies where people stand vis-à-vis their fellow members and with respect to national and global power structures

This case study enriches the notion of community politics. It broadens the concept to that of an arena which is approached from the plurality of positions of the peasant members. It rejects the notion of political engagement as a result of a representation of interests; instead, it calls for an analysis of the interplay between diverse social and economic constructions and the internal dialogue conducted among the participants.

The author argues for an approach to political practices firmly situated in local and regional contexts. Thus, he challenges macroscopic studies of peasant rebellions which conceal the specificity of history and locality as well as microscopic descriptions of culture which dichotomize human nature between the 'them' and the 'us' (p.218).

This complexly argued work is an excellent piece of anthropological writing. At the theoretical as well as the substantive level, *Livelihood and Resistance* represents a major contribution to the literature on peasant economies and resistance movements. Furthermore, this volume is of great importance for Andean studies because it shows the ways in which Andean communities contain within them the seeds necessary to generate a critical, militant awareness regarding their exploitation. These communities are economic and social sources of life and of political engagement, and Andean people are thinkers of their own who are able to alter their circumstances.

Matthew COOPER and Margaret RODMAN, *New Neighbors: A Case Study of Cooperative Housing*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991. 326 pages, \$19.95 (paper).

By Barbara Spronk

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Those who work in the field of cooperative housing in Canada have produced a great deal of material on this alternative form of housing, but very little of it is readily accessible to those outside the field. Matthew Cooper and Margaret Rodman have rendered the wider world of urban and community research a considerable service with *New Neighbours*. Their major aim is to describe how this little-known kind of alternative housing works, by focusing on two relatively new co-ops, Harbourside and Wind-

ward, in the Harbourfront area of Toronto. Their wider aim, however, is to exemplify through this descriptive approach the benefits of resident control of housing, and thereby contribute to "the realization that citizen participation and democratic control are essential for the future of our cities" (p. x). By following the development of these communities through their first three years, Cooper and Rodman are able to elucidate several aspects of community formation, including the shaping influences of political and economic environment in which they are enmeshed, the impact of the conceptual baggage of private property and its attendant allegiances and values that co-op residents bring with them to their new homes, and the challenges these residents take up in their struggle to forge something they can call a "community" out of the mix of ages, abilities, affluence and ethnicity that constitutes their cluster of new neighbours.

The authors intentionally skirt issues like what constitutes democracy or how best to define community or participation, preferring to show how these concepts are put into practice in the daily lives of co-op developers and residents. For the most part, this approach works well, especially when we are allowed to hear the residents' own voices. The excerpts the authors have chosen from their volumes of transcripts never fail to touch the heart as well as the intellect. This grounding of the concepts of cooperative living in residents' own reality increases as the book progresses. The third and second-to-last chapters, on control and conflict, offer by far the richest mine of both conceptual and interpretive material. The authors' portrayal of flowers and shrubs as "not simply things people fight about", but rather as "things people fight with" (p. 24), is truly inspired, as is their overall demonstration of the ways in which spaces and physical constructions are settings for social actions and part of those actions, both constraining residents' behaviour and being constructed in social terms by that behaviour. Landscape provides a setting for social action, but also becomes part of that action.

By comparison with these last chapters, the initial chapters that deal with housing policy on the federal and Metro Toronto levels, the development history of the two co-ops, and an overview of cooperative organization and goals, seem somewhat bloodless and even tedious, especially for the non-Toronto reader. At times, too, the middle chapters on how these co-ops recruit new members and deal