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Latin American subaltern studies are in vogue, the meaning of "subaltern" having been enlarged since its origins in Asian studies and description as history-from-below.' Its proponents now view it as a word sufficiently elastic to embrace the [various] subordinated peoples of popular culture ..." (Stem, 1995: x) Whether social history was a sufficiently descriptive term and subaltern studies simply a more flashy way to describe such investigations could be
argued. In any event, in regards to the study of Latin American "minorities" (is any group, given the continent's enormous variety, really a majority?), the subject still encounters a number of self-imposed, if diminishing, constraints that academia, in the past, has masochistically assumed: gender blinders, practical illiteracy where the indigenous peoples and religious groups (and their influence) are concerned, and an almost deliberate ignorance of the considerable influence of the underclass on history (see Prugel, 1996: 15)

These intellectual prejudices are the concerns of the authors of several recent, and significant, books, in which the topics under consideration include Jews in Cuba, religious sects and indigenous peoples throughout Latin America, workers in Brazil, and criminals in Argentina and Uruguay. To such concerns, one might add many other groups and their problems that are now getting attention, including, Mexican-Americans, gays, Chicanos and Chicanas (see Garcia, 1988: 7)

Generally such topics have lacked, or still do lack, the usual attentions and amenities which the academy gives to a subject: learned societies, endowed chairs, and (the ultimate of all accolades) a department of its own. This is being rectified, and to mention the lacuna is not to deny that what are now stylishly called subaltern studies have, in the last two decades, become more and more popular; few academic conventions these days, for example, lack a section on women's and gender studies, and the popular culture movement has become a major industry.
Nevertheless, new kids on the block are not likely to be the favorite pursuit of university establishments.

Although the proliferation of subjects that are considered legitimate topics for scholarship is disquieting to some Latin Americanists, the ultimate consequence is that almost all that has been written about Latin America is probably going to have to be reinterpreted in the light of this mushrooming new scholarship. There has been a relative lot written about groups and individuals purporting to lead the masses, peronistas and PRIistas, but not so much about the masses themselves (see Mallon, 1994: 1513)

The historiography of any subaltern group is likely to be different from that of elite groups. There will hardly be much in the way of estate keeper records or newspaper society pages to peruse, though there is an abundant amount of material about the "other" Latin America that still awaits investigation: in criminal records, for example, residing in the archives of Latin America. In the case of Mexico, this reviewer can testify that there are tens of thousands of unexplored documents in such sources as the Archivo General de la Nacion, the Archivo General del Estado de Oaxaca, Archivo Historico de la Ciudad de Mexico, Archivo Judicial del Tribunal Superior de Justicia del Distrito Federal, Archivo del Tribunal Superior de Oaxaca, Juzgado de Serie Oaxaca, Biblioteca Nacional de Mexico, Coleccion La Fragua, Centro de Estudios de Historia de Mexico, Central Regional del Instituto Nacional de Antropologia e Historia (Oaxaca), the Microfilm del Archivo del Juzgado de Teposcolula, and many other places (see, convincingly, Stem, 1995: 439).
Lyman Johnson's The Problems of Order in Changing Societies is an excellent illustration of what mining such sources can produce. The "criminal school" to which his contributors belong (if it may, indeed, be called that) is concerned with social relationships among peoples sufficiently marginalized that their past is hard to recover. Thus, the Latin Americanists who are now working in this field are akin to such pioneer French scholars as Yves Castan and Nicole Castan and to innovative British scholars like J.S. Cockburn, J.A. Sharpe, and Douglas Hay.

The contributors to the Johnson volume provide six essays that demonstrate the ties between crime and the changing social order. This field, as he ruefully admits, is still "a minor subfield of social history" (p. ix), but it fleshes out recent observations about the evolution of Latin American society. 2 Although the mention of cases conjures up thoughts of tables and statistics, criminal records are not, as the Johnson book shows, the primary property of quantitative researchers. As a practical matter, the actual number of cases available for study usually comprise a dangerously small base from which to draw quantitative conclusions; nevertheless, such a sampling often affords an extremely strong base for the qualitative scholar.3

Their ability to generate sociologically meaningful data for statistical analysis, while useful, is only a secondary part of their appeal .... The main attraction of these records lies in the extremely rich quality of the depositions and testimonies given by poor women and men, including Indians and castas (Stern, 1995: 38)
Those who wrote no leather-bound memoirs and commissioned no oil portraits are at least to be recalled and remembered through court dossiers. Such records roughly divide into the eras before and after the beginnings of professional police forces. As Johnson suggests, the development of modern police departments in Latin America went hand-in-hand with the rise of a propertied middle class that sought reinforcement of its values.

In "Continuities in Crime and Punishment: Buenos Aires, 1820-50," Richard Slatta and Karla Robinson remark that “Organized protection came in 1821 with the creation of a municipal police department. Joaquin de Achaval headed the new department and charged his peoneros de policia with the particular duty of keeping a watchful eye on vagrants, widely believed to lounge about the city's numerous pulperformas. Like officers in other, early, municipal Latin American forces, the police in Buenos Aires had responsibility for a wide range of duties that substantiate the view that they were responding to the new concerns of the middle classes, including the enforcement of health regulations in bakeries, the maintenance of clean streets, and the removal of dead animals from public places (p. 21). Thus, the emerging, self-confident elites sought to be protected against the squalor of bakeries, the stench of expired horses - and from the underclass.”

Poor women received short shrift when they went to court with complaints of wife-beating, kidnapping, and assault. On many occasions, the only punishment for rape was a short, temporary exile to another town (p. 9). The Spanish
(or white) woman had a much better chance of obtaining her due than did those of darker color, while, in almost all cases of crime against single women, the female victim was usually presumed, both by the court and the social norms, to have deserved the injury (p. 10).

This disparity in justice is also evident in John Charles Chasteen's brilliant "Violence for Show: Knife Dueling on a Nineteenth-Century Cattle Frontier," where duels between equals could end with a ceremonial slash to the cheek, but where Indians involved with whites had to kill or be killed since a symbolic blow would have established a forbidden social dominance and been suicidal for the perpetrator (p. 52).

We are all acquainted with past Latin American studies preoccupied with treaties and the high life. Because the complexity of society was missing from many accounts, the challenge now is to reconstruct a multi-tiered reality (Hareven, 1991: 95). The study of so-called minorities is a necessary part of that process. Possibly one reason why minorities were not, until now, accorded the sort of attention they are presently receiving from scholars like Johnson and his cohorts is that minorities were not considered interesting in quite the same way as notable rulers, robber barons and/or statesmen. As a consequence, the picture presented is not only inaccurate, but the ruling class gains further empowerment by virtue of having history on its side (Prakash, 1994: 1482-1483). What is being missed is that much of what has happened in Latin America in the past has not been solely the activity of an
elite, but, as Margaret Keck is at pains to point out in The Workers' Party and Democratization in Brazil:

the interaction between ... two processes: one a highly conservative process, in which traditional forms of elite dominance have been maintained and even reinforced, and one in which new forms of political and social organization have arisen to challenge the status quo (p. 2).

She demonstrates this with her analysis of the Partido dos Trabalhadores (PT, or Workers' Party), which has vigorously pursued the previously excluded sectors of the population (p. 3). As she writes, in the present attempted redemocratization of Latin America, . . . the debate about democracy becomes an arena for struggles over the rules of the game and over who will be recognized as legitimate participants in the political process. The more the various participants in the debate accept the legitimacy of a multiplicity of definitions of what is possible and create institutions (or use existing institutions) to mediate the inevitable conflicts that result, the more likely is a democratic outcome (p. 23).

Attention to the minorities does not mean condemning Latin America to class warfare (see Sandos, 1994: 596597). Keck demonstrates that, besides empowering the poor, the Workers Party has gradually broadened its constituency, something almost inevitable when political parties reach for success: Party discourse evolved from one which constantly emphasized organized labor to one which was much more inclusive. In the second half of the 1980s, the party was much more willing to work with other parties
both in particular elections and on particular political campaigns (p. 227).

A strong current of social justice runs through social history, whether in consideration of blacks or women, criminals or workers. Perhaps, however, it is most clearly seen in studies of religious movements. The volume entitled Religion and Democracy in Latin America, edited by William H. Swatos Jr., is not optimistic about the contribution religious groups can make, remarking that Sociocultural conditions are so strongly weighed against democracy in Latin America that there is serious question whether any democratizing agent can actually do the job (p. viii). In general, the contributors to his collection are more optimistic than he is.

In "Religious Competition, Community Building, and Democracy in Latin America: Grassroots Religious Organizations in Venezuela," Bryan T. Frohle is very much of the Robert Putnam and the Bowling Alone school. A strong, independent institutional and associational life is an essential mobilizer and mediator of support for democratic politics. Civil society, institutions and associations ultimately are themselves sustained by community "spirit" and sociability. This is the great irony of democratic politics: "democracy" enables individual freedoms, but those freedoms are provided through collective identity and bonds of solidarity in mutually intelligible discourse and everyday interactions. In a sense,
"communities" are the forces that organize, mediate, and maintain democratic politics (p. 27).
That said, Professor Frohle, unsurprisingly, takes the line that the religious competition which Protestant religious sects introduced into Latin America represents a healthy influence. In other words, the creation and vitality of minorities, per se, promotes tolerance and other democratic virtues (see p.41).
Such a view stands against the proposition of Robert M. Levine in a book lavishly illustrated with rare photographs: Tropical Diaspora: The Jewish Experience in Cuba - that being Cuban meant being Catholic and that, by extension, integration into Latin American society has meant acceptance of Catholicism (p. 286). As he emphasizes, Cuba was not ever a pluralistic democracy, either before or after 1959 (p. 287). Moreover, in his opinion, it is not Catholicism alone which is responsible for the "pervasive hostility and suspicion with which minorities are characterized in Latin America" but, rather, Some explanations for this attitude include the fact that suspicion of outsiders occurs when there are weak national institutions that treat citizens universalistically, and where dependence on family and client-based, in-group networks remains a mechanism of self-protection (p. 288).
With this impressive study, Professor Levine, who is the author of Cuba in the 1850s and Images of History: Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Century Latin American Photographs as Documents as well, has earned a secure place for himself as one of the outstanding practitioners of multi-disciplinary and multi-sourced Latin American history.
The recent story of Cuban Jewry is one of difficulties and continuing decline, though, in some cases, racial minorities are deliberately becoming religious minorities as well by converting to one or another of the Protestant denominations. This is the story told by Conrad L. Kanagy in "The Formation and Development of a Protestant Conversion Movement among the Highland Quichua of Ecuador." Traditionally subordinate to the point of anonymity, the Quichua have turned to Protestantism from Catholicism, acquiring visibility and launching such local initiatives as a savings and credit agency, agricultural supply store, well-drilling project for water, and a scheme to distribute potato seeds (p. 144). As Kanagy notes, The congregational authority of the local church, along with the integration of community and church interests, has further solidified the autonomy and cohesiveness of the local community (p.140).

A number of the writers in the book edited by Donna Lee Van Cott, Indigenous Peoples and Democracy in Latin America, address the relationship between the indigenous and religion. In "On Brazil and Its Indians," Carlos Frederico Mares de Souza Jr. comments that "in spite of receiving five centuries of preaching of a sole religion and a sole God, each indigenous people continues with its own beliefs and spirituality" (p. 229). One wonders, then, if the conversions to the particular sect are genuine or just another way of manifesting autonomy and independence. In Guatemala, as Richard N. Adams notes in "A Report on the Political Status of the Guatemalan Maya,"
Over the past 20 years there has been a significant increase in the numbers of Protestants, fundamentalists, Pentecostals, and others, for reasons that lie beyond the scope of this book. In some ways, this has been extremely divisive, since Protestant sects and congregations are very independent, and members necessarily lose the integrative relation that tied practicing Catholics to a larger social order. However, many Protestant Indian leaders not only insist that their religion in no way dilutes their Mayan identity, but even that it conforms to the Mayan cosmovision (p. 176).

What he could have discussed in this respect, but does not, is that some Mayans are converting not to Protestantism but, rather, to versions of the old Mayan religion, using the Popol Vuj as a sacred book.

Redemocratization of Latin America entails the empowerment of minorities that have long embraced anti-statism in the face of decades of authoritarian domination. These groups are no longer just victims but also active political agents (Davalos, 1996: 103). That they are now being reincorporated into the political fabric is a momentous development. Generalizations made about Latin American culture have done little justice to its growing pluralism and its ethnocultural mixing (Stern, 1995: ix, 37). However, the present discussion should avoid a renewal of the arguments of the 1920s and 1930s that the treatment of minority history as a digression from the "great issues" is not accidental but part of an agenda (Stern, 1995: 9). The omissions have not been a conspiracy, and these days most Latin Americanists unhesitatingly
welcome those who wish to pursue such studies as criminology and gender.

A warning is in order, though, that, as the reclamation of the past proceeds, it may not produce what is anticipated (see Cooper, 1994: 1544-1545). Research into minorities is not guaranteed to present a positive picture of them. For example, the notion that general harmony and balance prevailed among Indians, as contrasted with the powerseeking and violence of mestizos, begins to look like a stereotype (Stern, 1995: 9). What minority groups are now entitled to have from scholars is a revised portrait, but one with warts and all.

NOTES
1. All the principal articles in the December 1994 issue of the American Historical Review are devoted to subaltern studies. The article by Florencia E. Mallon on subalternism and Latin America is essential reading for the history of the movement.
2. The criminological literature devoted to Latin America provides many examples of methodological sophistication and conceptual ingenuity, but there has been no effort, as yet, to create a single theoretical and interpretive context from these analyses of individual cases separated in space and time (Johnson: 117; article cited in References).
3. To be read correctly, working class material must be subject to the kind of in-depth, serious interpretation that peels away layers of meaning. Consider what transpired in Tepoztlan (Mexico) in 1777, as see by Stern. The local population had collected lime for municipal improvements,
but a new priest decided to ship it to the church in Tlayacapan. The women assailed them with stones, unloaded the mules, and mauled the priest. But behind the incident was the fact that the priest, it develops, ...had trod on gender sensibilities, practices, and privileges that directly affected women. He opposed, for example, several customary practices associated with courtship and marriage: the brideprice service required of novios who brought water and wood to the households of novias before formal marriage, the social tolerance of sexual contract between novias and novios when poor families postponed marriage or encouraged a prolonged courtship phase, and the residence of newlyweds with the young man's parents and the accompanying apprenticeship of the young wife-servant to her mother-in-law (Stem: 20. So the incident has several meanings, perhaps the most important of which is that the priest was upsetting the prerogatives of women in family life - not just purloining a load of lime.

REFERENCES


