

Whose History?

Much Work Ahead for Indigenous Historians



There are few texts in which indigenous voices speak for themselves. This historiography still needs to be written by both men and women of Abya Yala. Until today our history has been oral. Generally, our voices have been recorded in colonial languages, which in effect, are translations. Our own literature, should be caustic, in regard to those texts which have relegated us to being objects of study. Maybe those who objectify us forget that we can read their accounts. Here is a sample of three relevant texts: *The Elder Brothers: A Lost South American People and their Wisdom* (1990) by Alan Ereira; *War of Shadows* (1991) by Michael Brown and Eduardo Fernández; *Indigenous Voices* (1992) by Roger Moody. In contraposition, we can find texts (e.g., *Taraq* written by the Aymara historian Carlos Mamani Condori in 1991) that have been written by indigenous people themselves, presenting a

different voice.

Ereira's book is a good example of "colonial anguish". We do not believe that indigenous peoples' struggles can be understood until colonial attitudes are abandoned when facing indigenous cultures. In his account, Ereira "becomes" the spokesperson for the Kogi people of the Sierra of Santa Marta in Colombia. In very few pages can we hear the Kogi's own voices. Instead, the author-historian basically presents his own saga which coincides with those of the Kogi, who are a living example of what Europe and the United States call "ecological sustainability". This book does, however, illustrate the constant threats experienced by the Kogi, and their efforts to live harmoniously with nature.

Michael Brown and Eduardo Fernández's book documents the guerrilla phenomenon in Perú, describing the Ashaninka Indigenous tribe's experiences as they struggle to win a fight that is not theirs. The heroes in this account are the guerrillas and the authors themselves. The Ashaninkas' voices are barely heard throughout the book. The text should be considered as a history of the sixties and seventies of Perú, but not of the Ashaninkas, except as victims of the political left and right, the missionaries, the government and the armed forces.

Moody's *Indigenous Voices* is a collection of indigenous texts. Moody takes advantage of the demands published by Indigenous leaders in the Working Group of the United Nations, and decided to compile them into a book. Moody's project is highly questionable given that the texts printed were all produced by indigenous nations, yet there is not a single instance in the book in which the Indigenous contributors were invited to participate in the editing process. In a world where publications are the equivalent of business cards, indigenous peoples are once again objects of the text, rather than subjects capable of articulating our own ideas.

In contrast to the above texts is Mamani Condori's *Taraq*, which is one of the first texts produced by an Aymara historian. He started by studying documents related to the Aymara territories. In an eloquent job, *Taraq* presents the Aymaras' voices, who are thus the text's ultimate owners. This text shows more than ever, that it is imperative for the nation-states to recognize the Aymara as the legitimate caretakers of their territory and halt the abuses directed against them. Mamani Condori is a member of the Andean Oral History Workshop in Chuquiawu, Kollasuyo, in Bolivia. ♡



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