Dilemmas of Modernity

Bolivian Encounters with Law and Liberalism

Mark Goodale

Dilemmas of Modernity provides a new framework for understanding Bolivia's contested present through the study of local encounters with transnational law, liberalism, and the institutions and agents of development.

Dilemmas of Modernity provides an innovative approach to the study of contemporary Bolivia, moving telescopically between social, political, legal, and discursive analyses, and drawing from a range of disciplinary traditions. Based on a decade of research, it offers an account of local encounters with law and liberalism. Mark Goodale presents, through a series of finely grained readings, a window into the lives of people in rural areas of Latin America who are playing a crucial role in the emergence of postcolonial states.

The book contends that the contemporary Bolivian experience is best understood by examining historical patterns of intention as they emerge from everyday practices. It provides a compelling case study of the appropriation and reconstruction of transnational law at the local level, and gives key insights into this important South American country.

“Dilemmas of Modernity is a cunning ethnography of patterns of law, intention and meaning in Bolivia. Yet it is more besides: the book is a reflection on and demonstration of anthropology's relevance not just to the study of law but to the formation of what Goodale calls 'theory pursued by the social'... Richly evoking the worlds of Bolivians' making—perhaps not as they would have chosen, yet in a sense still self-imposed—Goodale presents a fascinating study that is likely to... enhance the conversation in the anthropologies of law and modernity, sociolegal studies on human rights, liberalism's vernacularization, and the paradoxes of the law's universalist claims in a world of wrenching particularities.”

— Bill Maurer, University of California, Irvine

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Goodale's examination of law and liberalism in Bolivia makes a compelling argument: that the social and political revolution underway in contemporary Bolivia, which seems to be a rejection of liberal strategies of the past decades, is in fact a renewal of the values of liberalism. Clear and often lyrical, this is an interesting and original contribution to the literature on Bolivia. — Nancy Postero, University of California, San Diego

“Mark Goodale convincingly argues that one can best understand the Bolivian experience only through examining the articulation of historical patterns of intention and concrete social practices. This is a fascinating read that presents much new and original analysis.” — Shannon Speed, University of Texas at Austin

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