

Maristella Svampa, translated by Alejandro Reyes, *Latin America in Debate: Indigeneity, Development, Dependency, Populism*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2025. 416 pages. ISBN 978-1478031949. \$54.90 pbk.

Renowned Argentine social theorist Maristella Svampa's comprehensive and substantial academic work explores the development paths and key forces shaping Latin America from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century to the present. She is particularly well-known for her focus on Indigenous issues in the region, including neo-extractivism, socio-environmental conflicts and the rise of new social movements. Svampa's analysis reveals how Indigenous peoples are leading the charge in resisting the expansion of the extractivist frontier, encompassing mining, agribusiness and hydrocarbons. This book expands her theoretical insights by directly addressing relevant issues impacting Indigenous peoples, such as uneven development, economic globalization and populism.

This highly theoretical book requires a solid understanding of Latin American society, politics and history to fully grasp its main arguments. Consequently, it is not an easy read. The book is structured around four key themes: the debate over Indigenous identities within postcolonial nation-states; the impact of development on politics, economics and society; the realities of economic dependence in a global capitalist system; and the rise of populism as a social and political response to uneven development. These themes are carefully analysed and contextualized, revealing the tensions they have fostered and reshaped alternative social and political debates. While these four themes clearly warrant critical examination, the journal's length limitations prevent a more in-depth analysis. Therefore, I will focus my review on the first key theme, which is highly relevant to readers of this academic journal.

Svampa begins by critiquing the social theory gap in Latin America, a "deficit of accumulation" as mentioned on page one. This gap stems from undervaluing social research due to systemic underfunding, intellectual exile, and epistemological expropriation. Furthermore, weaknesses in generational knowledge sharing within the Latin American academic community, the region's anthropophagic culture (rejecting foreign cultures while selectively adopting imported research techniques), and material expropriation all contribute to this problem. To address these issues, Svampa proposes reframing debates in Latin American social sciences around four key topics: Indianism, development, dependency, and populism. She tackles this challenging task by engaging with the most recognised Latin American intellectual traditions and perspectives that have shaped social-political discourses around these themes. Svampa provides exhaustive coverage, highlighting the tensions and shifts that have emerged. However, she omits the peasant question, a significant theme in Latin American research, likely due to its extensive nature and potential to exceed the book's scope. In summary, Svampa engages in a political, intellectual and pedagogical challenge. She seeks to reconcile the idea of the public intellectual, committed to progressive social change, with the critical tradition of Latin American thought. Elective affinity guides her in reclaiming the intellectual significance of subalternist, postcolonial and decolonial perspectives, as well as the epistemology of Latin America.

Svampa's examination of Latin America's "Indigenous Question" is remarkably balanced and historically contextualized. Indigenous peoples, or more accurately, Indigenous movements, have played a crucial role in shaping Latin America's postcolonial societies. These movements have made significant efforts to empower marginalized communities, transforming constitutional, social and political landscapes throughout the region's history. By prioritizing autonomy, identity and territorial rights, they have challenged Latin America's social development trajectories and advanced more inclusive, participatory and just forms of political and economic democracy. This legacy continues to influence Latin America in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, as evidenced by examples from Mexico, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Chile, Bolivia and Brazil. Despite their efforts and significant population, Indigenous peoples in Latin America still face systematic marginalization and discrimination. Postcolonial states have not consistently addressed this injustice, and in nearly every country, they continue to face threats as global capitalism, supported by postcolonial states, erodes their traditional connection to the land, threatens their languages, cultures and livelihoods.

This context provides the author's point of reference for analyzing two prominent Indigenous theoretical perspectives that have significantly influenced Latin American social science research: *Indigenismo* (Indigenism) and *Indianismo* (Indianism). These are distinct and opposing concepts with political implications. Svampa is correct in identifying Indigenismo as a political and administrative category that emerged in 20<sup>th</sup> century Latin America. This movement, primarily championed by non-Indigenous intellectuals, aimed to recognize, protect, and include Indigenous peoples within nation-states. While Indigenism valued Indigenous heritage, culture, language, and traditions, it often promoted assimilation into the dominant Creole nation-state. It flourished between 1910 and 1970, significantly impacting countries with large Indigenous populations, including Mexico, Guatemala, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, and Bolivia. For instance, in Mexico, Indigenism played a crucial role in nation-building following the Mexican Revolution. Intellectuals like Manuel Gamio, Moisés Sáenz, Alfonso Caso, and Gonzalo Aguirre Beltrán, among many others, were instrumental in shaping policies that established institutions fostering cultural pride in pre-Columbian culture, history, and heritage. These institutions actively promoted the assimilation of Indigenous peoples into the modern nation-state. However, this movement had a flaw: it failed to actively promote Indigenous peoples' integration into the national economy. While Indigenism sought political integration, it ultimately neglected and failed to protect Indigenous peoples' traditional land connection, which underpinned their economies. Consequently, the intrusion of modern capitalism into rural areas led to widespread social and economic marginalization of Indigenous peoples across Mexico and other Latin American countries with large Indigenous populations.

By the late 1970s, it became evident that Indigenism had reached its limits. It could not explain why Indigenous peoples continued to live in such poor socio-economic conditions. This period witnessed intense social and economic polarization, rural popular mobilization, left-wing military social reformism, right-wing military counter-reformism, and failed economic experiments, all severely impacting Indigenous communities. The Creole nation-state in Latin

America had failed to incorporate Indigenous peoples, and the vast majority still faced discrimination, exploitation and oppression.

From the 1980s onward, a new wave of Indigenous movements emerged in Latin America to confront the lingering legacy of colonialism. These movements engaged in intricate political mobilization, organization, and networking at local, national, and international levels. They utilized international law, participated in global social justice networks, and formed political coalitions to propose innovative visions and practices of democracy and development. Their goal was to democratize vertical power structures by prioritizing community involvement and advocating for more inclusive, equitable, and sustainable development paths. This is the backdrop for the emergence of Indianism. Svampa meticulously traces Indianism's origins, meaning, and political implications. Born from concrete social struggles, Indianism gained prominence in Indigenous movements across Ecuador, Peru, and Bolivia, countries with significant Indigenous populations. It rejects patriarchal, capitalist, racist, and anthropocentric forms of colonialism, challenging the very foundations of the Creole-dominated nation-state, global capitalism's power structures, and the systemic destruction of ecosystems that have sustained Indigenous livelihoods for centuries, if not millennia. Svampa carefully avoids embedding Indianism within the Marxist class structure concept, as it doesn't accurately capture its true essence. Indianism, as a social, political, and cultural expression, holds immense power and transformative potential. Its clear objective is to fundamentally transform the Creole-dominated nation-state, which has for centuries restricted Indigenous peoples' sovereignty, autonomy, and independence. However, challenging this state is no easy task, as the Latin American Creole nation-state is deeply entrenched with powerful external and internal forces that strongly oppose Indigenous political goals. Recent cases in Bolivia and Ecuador demonstrate that Indianism must extend beyond Indigenous communities to truly become a potent force for systemic social, political, economic, cultural, and environmental change.

This book offers numerous valuable lessons. Perhaps the most important is recognizing that Indigenous peoples are not passive participants in the complex and often conflictual process of social, political and economic development. While the struggle for sovereignty, autonomy and land rights remains incomplete in Latin America, this book clearly demonstrates that Indigenous struggles necessitate a political discourse grounded in reflection and action rooted within Indigenous communities. I strongly recommend this book for graduate courses on Latin American Studies and Indigenous/Native Studies.

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